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DISASTER RESISTANT COMMUNITIES  
INITIATIVE: EVALUATION OF THE PILOT  
PHASE. YEAR 2

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**DISASTER RESISTANT COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE  
EVALUATION OF THE PILOT PHASE—YEAR 2**

**YEAR 2 REPORT**

**PROJECT # EMW-97-CA-0519**

Prepared for the  
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## **ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT IMPACT: YEAR 2**

### **Introduction**

This report summarizes findings from the second year of an ongoing project that focuses on the implementation of Project Impact in the seven communities that were chosen as pilot sites for the initiative. Assessments of the progress pilot communities had made by the end of the first year of Project Impact funding were reported in August, 1998. That first year report found that pilot communities had begun to develop a good understanding of PI's partnership philosophy, that hazard assessment activities were under way, and that focused mitigation projects had been initiated. Among the potential problems that were identified were difficulties with motivating private-sector organizations to become partners in the initiative and some lack of clarity about the kinds of activities that constitute mitigation (as opposed to public education and preparedness). Overall, DRC found that communities had begun making good progress toward encouraging adoption of pre-disaster mitigation as a community wide goal, and that the kinds of difficulties communities reported with embarking on PI were no more serious than those that can be expected to accompany any new intergovernmental program partnership.

Approximately one year after its initial visits to the seven pilot communities, the Disaster Research Center recontacted informants, again visited each community, and collected documentary materials in order to chart progress that was being made in carrying out PI plans. The sections that follow present data on the status of PI implementation, focusing on the following areas:

- status of program activities in the areas of mitigation, partnerships, public education, and program management structure;
- partnering arrangements and strategies;
- the ways in which recent disasters and local political and economic changes have affected PI implementation;
- the nature and extent of leveraging activities in the pilot communities;
- strategies communities have used to build and maintain momentum;
- innovative activities that have been initiated with PI support; and
- lessons learned by communities that have applicability for wider implementation efforts

## **Year 2 Data Collection Strategy**

The Year 2 study used three data-collection approaches: telephone interviewing, face-to-face interviews in the seven PI communities; and the systematic collection and analysis of documents providing descriptive information on PI activities. A total of 24 in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with key stakeholders identified in Year 1 in the seven pilot communities. These in-depth interviews were taped and later transcribed. The interviewees were sent questions and response aids in advance to assist them in preparing for the telephone interview. These included both questions on the program and checklists designed to document progress on PI activities (see Appendices A and C). The interview schedule used in the formal telephone interview included questions on the following topics: changes in the community “climate” (e.g., changes in economics, elected political officials and their priorities, and disaster events); changes from Year 1 baseline information; modifications of Year 1 PI activities; partnership statuses (e.g., continuing involvement of Year 1 partners, strategies for new partnership development, partnership momentum); assessment of integration of PI into community activities; organizational structure for PI; creative ideas; lessons learned; major highlights and challenges; and resources and future needs (see Appendix B). In addition to the in-depth interviews, follow-up site visits were made to each of the 7 PI communities to conduct less formal interviews and to collect educational or other relevant materials. These seven trips took place in June and July, 1999. Visits lasted 2-3 days in each city and involved speaking with 2-8 people in each community who were especially knowledgeable about PI activities.

## **Status of Mitigation Activities in Year 2**

In Year 1 of the PI evaluation, DRC developed a checklist of possible governmental mitigation actions that could have been taken by communities prior to the initiation of Project Impact. Those 11 items are listed below. The checklist was then used in Year 1 to establish the “baseline” status of mitigation activities in each of the seven pilot communities.

### **Checklist of Governmental Mitigation Activities**

1. Adopting building code provisions for new construction (buildings, homes, critical facilities, schools, highways, bridges, etc.)
2. Adopting building code provisions, ordinances, or regulations for retrofitting or rehabilitating existing structures (buildings, homes, critical facilities, schools, highways, bridges, etc.)
3. Developing an inventory of hazardous buildings
4. Retrofitting or strengthening existing public facilities (e.g., schools, city or county buildings, fire or police stations)

5. Retrofitting or strengthening existing private structures (e.g., businesses, commercial buildings, theaters, churches, single-family residences, multi-family residences)
6. Retrofitting, strengthening, or upgrading public infrastructure (e.g., bridges and roadways, water treatment and distribution systems, wastewater treatment and sewerage systems, electrical and gas utility systems, communication systems)
7. Identifying or mapping especially hazardous areas
8. Adopting land-use or zoning ordinances to regulate development or sale of land
9. Relocating public or private structures that are in high-hazard areas
10. Removing public or private structures that are in high-hazard areas
11. Qualifying or improving the community's CRS rating

This mitigation checklist was used in the Year 2 evaluation in order to assess the extent to which changes were taking place in the pilot communities. Using data from telephone and face-to-face interviews, as well as program-related data that were collected for each community, DRC documented those changes, making it possible to compare current activity levels to baseline measures.

Findings from that analysis are presented in Table 1. Of the seven communities, only one had achieved the maximum score of 11, indicating that mitigation activities were ongoing in all areas covered by the rating scale. However, it should be noted that this same community had already been involved in activities in all 11 areas of focus at the time of the Year 1 assessment. Among pilot communities, the number of mitigation actions taken prior to joining the program ranged from a low of 3 to the high of 11, with a mean of 7.1. In Year 2, the lowest score changed significantly to 6, with the mean increasing to 8.4. Three of the communities had the same number of activities as they had in Year 1, but it should be noted that these were also the communities that had already scored higher on baseline measures. In other words, improvement was greatest among communities that had not undertaken as many mitigation activities initially.

Across all the communities, there was a 15% increase in the types of mitigation actions that had been adopted. However, for those communities that reported undertaking fewer mitigation activities during Year 1, there was a 29% increase in the number of different types of mitigation actions by Year 2. The types of new mitigation activities being undertaken include: hazard identification and mapping; inventorying hazardous buildings; retrofitting specific structures and public infrastructure; relocating public facilities; and adopting land use and zoning requirements. Improvements are in fact more marked than these scores might suggest, since general categories can include a variety of more-specific mitigation activities.

In assessing improvement on the 11 mitigation measures, is also important to note that DRC's approach to assessing mitigation is conservative and probably underestimates the amount of progress communities are actually making. DRC included in its Year 2 totals only activities that had actually been completed, not those that were ongoing. Thus, actions that had been initiated but not finished by the time Year 2 data were collected were not reflected in Table 1. Carrying out meaningful mitigation programs is something that can only take place over time. Because DRC chose to incorporate only mitigation actions that had already been completed, activities such as moving structures out of hazardous areas and retrofitting buildings, which typically take years to complete, were not reflected in the Year 2 assessment. Considerable progress was being made that was not reflected in community scores. For example, three communities were working on applications for CRS ratings, but had not yet completed the process.

**TABLE 1. BASELINE AND YEAR 2 MITIGATION SCORES  
FOR ELEVEN TYPES OF MITIGATION MEASURES**

	<b>Number of Activities Completed prior to PI Involvement</b>	<b>Number of Activities Completed Since Initiation of PI</b>
Community 1	11	11
Community 2	9	9
Community 3	8	9
Community 4	3	6
Community 5	7	9
Community 6	8	8
Community 7	4	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>59</b>

## **Year 2 Status of Project Impact Process Measures**

In Year 1 of the PI evaluation, DRC combined information from the statements of work and the MOA's in order to systematically document what actions communities had originally planned to undertake in order to become more disaster resistant. As part of the Year 2 follow-up evaluation, DRC sent charts listing those planned activities (see Appendix C for an example of a chart that was used for one pilot site) to key individuals in each of the seven pilot communities. For purposes of analysis, the activities included in the SOW's and MOA's and in the community assessment charts were then classified under the four main PI program elements: risk/vulnerability assessment; mitigation; partnerships; and public education.

Informants contacted during the Year 2 study were asked to characterize the status of each Project Impact activity contained in the assessment charts. The options presented to informants were that: (1) the community had decided not to pursue the activity; (2) the activity had begun and was ongoing; (3) the activity had been completed; or (4) the activity was still planned, but would be carried out in the future. Informants were also given the option of indicating that they did not know the status of particular activities.

It should be noted that in developing its assessment checklist, DRC omitted some activities related to organizational issues, such as hiring PI coordinators, because those activities could not be easily assigned to a particular program element. Also excluded were activities that the communities said they had never intended doing, even if those activities had appeared in the MOA. There was also some overlap between the activities undertaken and the four program elements. For example, some of the educational or informational activities were designed both to disseminate information and obtain and engage partners. Similarly, there is also some overlap between risk assessments and mitigation actions because the assessments were done in order to help prioritize mitigation activities. In these cases, DRC assigned activities to program elements based on their major emphases and ultimate goals.

The sections that follow present information on what DRC found in the seven PI pilot communities, focusing separately on each of the four major program areas.

### **Status of Project Impact Risk and Vulnerability Activities**

With respect to the risk assessment and vulnerability element of PI, DRC included any activity that identified hazards associated with critical facilities, determined the vulnerability of public infrastructure and populations, and assessed risks to utility and transportation systems. Also included in this category are any plans that were developed to provide a basis for actions to reduce hazards such as completed risk assessments, GIS mapping, and updated hazard mitigation plans. Even though plans are not in and of themselves risk assessments, they are a necessary first step since they allow communities define and prioritize their mitigation projects.

Across all of the communities there are a total of 40 activities centering on some form of risk assessment (see Table 2). Thirty of these are ongoing activities; the highest number of ongoing assessments in any community is nine, and the lowest is two. Across all seven communities, 11 risk assessment activities had been completed by Year 2; some communities had completed none of their assessments, while one community completed six.

Three of the communities decided to postpone a total of four other risk or vulnerability assessments at this time. However, it should be noted that all of these communities have assessments currently in progress and one (Community 4) has completed a substantial number (6) already.

Only one community decided not to pursue a risk assessment activity that had been included in its MOA. In this case, HAZUS had been identified earlier as an appropriate risk assessment tool, but currently only an earthquake HAZUS tool is available to communities, and this particular community is not subject to seismic hazards. Perhaps when additional HAZUS tools are available for flooding and wind, communities will be more inclined to investigate their use. It is also important to note that the fact that a community decides not to pursue an activity that is identified in its MOA is not necessarily a negative finding. The expectation is that community priorities will evolve over the course of Project Impact and that not all measures that were originally seen as potentially valuable will actually be adopted. Some communities developed MOA's rather quickly but changed their plans after additional thought and consultation with partners.

With respect to hazard, risk and vulnerability assessment activities, two general conclusions can be made:

1. An impressive amount of new assessment activities are taking place; however, almost no vulnerability assessments have been done or are planned for the future.
2. Smaller communities with little assessment experience prior to their involvement in PI are making the most progress in characterizing their risks.

### **Status of Project Impact Mitigation Activities:**

In the mitigation category, only specific mitigation activities, not plans, are included. These activities include retrofitting homes, Spring Break activities focusing on hazard mitigation, improving land use management, developing and implementing tool lending programs, removing nonstructural hazards, elevating structures, protecting lifeline facilities, and acquiring flood-damaged property.

Across all of the communities, there were 35 mitigation activities taking place as of Year 2, 26 of which are still in progress. An additional nine have been completed, and nine are planned for the future. A total of four mitigation activities were not being pursued: the retrofitting of a home,

which was determined to be not cost beneficial; retrofitting a business because of the type of activity the business performed; and two very large mitigation projects that, at the time data were collected, had not obtained sufficient funding to be carried out.

In an effort to determine how those most involved in managing and carrying out PI activities in each community assessed the value of PI as a process to encourage mitigation, interviewees were asked to rate program efforts in this area on a 10-point scale (1 indicating “not good at all” and 10 indicating “very good”). The responses for this question ranged from 5 to 10, with a mean of 7.7. The most frequent response was a 9, indicating that these people saw the PI process as a very positive vehicle by which mitigation could be achieved.

Those who rated PI most positively (a 9 or 10) often mentioned that process had led to greater community involvement. Some examples of their comments include that PI has become a community-wide effort; that the program has reached many members of the community through education; that the community is very positive about the program and glad to have become involved in PI; that the “first step is to pull many people into the tent;” that PI provides an opportunity for community involvement, allowing residents to be proactive, but not denying them autonomy; and that PI has been the catalyst for many efforts that are going on in the community and can take credit for moving that progress along.

Those who rated PI lowest (a 5 or a 6) generally indicated that the concept was interesting, but community motivation to engage in mitigation was low, projects were going too slowly, or another disaster was necessary to get people’s attention directed toward the need to mitigate. Those in the middle (providing a rating of 7 or 8) stated that the community was on the right track but had a long way to go, or that they had difficulties with FEMA (either having communication problems or getting off to a slow start because the initial approval process was delayed).

Three general conclusions concerning changes concerning mitigation activities can be drawn:

1. There has been an impressive, rapid increase in both structural and non-structural mitigation programs in the PI pilot communities.
2. The most rapid increases have taken place in the communities with the poorest mitigation histories prior to their involvement in the PI initiative.
3. There is a general optimism about the PI process, but a number of barriers to mitigation activities-both internal to the community and between the community and FEMA-still need to be overcome.

Across both the risk assessment and mitigation categories, the larger communities have more projects ongoing, while the smaller communities have more completed. Additionally, the larger communities have no activities planned for the future, but all of the smaller ones do. This suggests



that given the same amount of funding, smaller communities can get more assessment and mitigation projects completed, despite the shortage of local government resources (e.g. expertise and personnel) that often exist at that level. Perhaps the more direct access to key governmental actors and community organizations makes it easier for smaller communities to meet their objectives. Also, larger communities must negotiate through a multi-layered bureaucracy and influence more “protected” policy makers to pursue their objectives. Additionally, the complexity of problems in larger urban environments, including a larger amount of the building stock that is at risk and vulnerable due to density, size, and aging, may well require proportionally more effort to conduct hazard assessments, identify and prioritize hazardous structures and systems, and develop politically acceptable policies to lessen disaster impacts. Finally, any comparison among communities should also take into account the size of the mitigation program that is being undertaken. Some mitigation efforts are simply larger, more complex, and more challenging than others, and these activities will naturally take longer to complete.

In summary, within two years, the seven pilot communities have completed 20 new assessment and mitigation activities and are working on an additional 56 projects. While data are not available on nationwide averages or mitigation activities in communities that resemble PI communities but that do not have special programs, it does seem highly unlikely that this level of activity would have taken place without the infusion of financial and technical resources from Project Impact.

**TABLE 2. PROJECT IMPACT RISK ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION ACTIVITIES - YEAR 2 STATUS**

	Risk and Vulnerability Assessment/Plan Development				Mitigation				Totals			
	Ongoing	Completed	Decided Not to Pursue	Planned For Future	Ongoing	Completed	Decided Not to Pursue	Planned For Future	Ongoing	Completed	Decided Not to Pursue	Planned For Future
Community 1	9	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	13	1	0	0
Community 2	4	1	0	0	1	4	1	0	5	5	1	0
Community 3	5	0	0	2	5	2	0	2	10	2	0	4
Community 4	2	6	0	1	2	0	1	0	4	6	1	1
Community 5	3	2	0	0	3	3	0	2	6	5	0	2
Community 6	3	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	10	0	0	0
Community 7	4	1	1	1	4	0	2	5	8	1	3	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>

## **Status of Project Impact Partnerships**

Developing partnerships is a major PI goal because it is so closely linked with the notion of community development to enhance disaster resistance. Not only are partnerships supposed to bring additional resources to the local community, but partnering is a fundamental way to introduce, educate, and involve diverse segments of the population in a collective effort to improve the community's ability to withstand future extreme natural events.

DRC's evaluation of partnership-building in the second year focused on activities that were undertaken to establish public-private linkages and broaden support for programs designed to enhance community disaster resistance. Examples of these kinds of partnership activities include: establishing a coordinating group in order to develop and implement a local mitigation strategy; establishing links between governmental agencies and the private sector; building community partnerships in order to fund PI activities; establishing business coalitions in support of PI; and identifying incentives for participating in PI.

As Table 3 indicates, at the time of the second year assessment, pilot communities were involved in thirteen ongoing partnership-building activities. Individual communities reported involvement in either one or three ongoing partnerships activities. A total of five partnership building projects were described as having been completed. Four of these five activities had been initiated by a single community. Here again, however, it is important to note that these scores do not reflect partnership activities that informants described as still in the initiation phase or that were still in process. Individual communities were less likely to have completed partnership-building activities than other types of activities, primarily because many communities considered seeking new partners and trying to retain existing ones as an ongoing activity. No partnership-building activities had been abandoned since their first year, and only one community had a partnership activity planned for the future that was not currently ongoing.

In addition to asking communities about their partnership-building activities, interviewees were also asked about changes in the numbers, types, and activity levels of their partners engaged in PI. DRC examined the extent to which pilot communities were fostering partnership relationships among governmental and private sector entities, as well as the specific partnership strategies communities employed.

**TABLE 3. PROJECT IMPACT PARTNERSHIP AND EDUCATION-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES IN YEAR 2**

	Partnerships			Public Education/Information			Totals		
	Ongoing	Completed	Decided Not to Pursue	Planned For Future	Ongoing	Completed	Decided Not to Pursue	Planned For Future	
Community 1	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	6
Community 2	1	4	0	0	4	2	0	0	5
Community 3	3	0	0	0	6	1	0	1	9
Community 4	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Community 5	1	1	0	0	5	1	0	0	6
Community 6	1	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	10
Community 7	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	4	5
TOTAL	13	5	0	1	31	4	0	5	44

**TABLE 4. YEAR ONE PARTNERSHIPS -MOU**

	<b>Federal Partners</b>	<b>State Partners</b>	<b>Local and Non-Governmental Partners</b>	<b>Total Partners</b>
Community 1	7	2	12	21
Community 2	3	7	23	33
Community 3	3	6	28	37
Community 4	3	2	20	25
Community 5	3	3	14	20
Community 6	2	3	18	23
Community 7	5	6	12	23
Totals	26	29	127	182

Table 4 shows the number of partners listed on community Memoranda of Understanding at the time the initiative first got under way. The activity levels of these partnerships varied across the pilot communities because some cities and counties were further along in the implementation process during the first year of the assessment than others. For the most part, however, communities were still at the earliest of stages of the process, and we therefore concentrated on how many partners had agreed to take part in the initiative, rather than assessing at this point how involved each partner was in Project Impact activities. Accordingly, Table 1 reflects the number and types of partners that were initially acknowledged in the communities' Memoranda of Understanding. These partners were divided into three categories: federal government partners; state government partners; and local and non-governmental partners, a category that included government, business, and nonprofit organizations, as well as local branches of national organizations and business chains. In this first year, the pilot communities had signed an average of 26 total partners to the initiative, with numbers ranging from 20 to 37. Most of the partners were local and non-governmental, with the number of partnerships in this category ranging between 12 and 28 partners, with an average of 18.1. Federal partnerships ranged from 2 to 7, with an average 3.7, and state partnerships also ranged from 2 to 7, with an average of 4.1.

In the second year of the assessment, staff from the DRC presented respondents with the list of partners collected from their respective community's MOUs. Respondents were asked to rank each partner's involvement on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "not at all active" and 5 indicating "quite active." Additionally, they were also asked to indicate which of the organizations listed had actually not been involved in partnership activities, and they were encouraged to list any additional partners who had become involved with PI since the MOU was developed. Table 5 includes tabulations for federal, state, and local and non-governmental partners; the total number

of partners in each community; the number of those partners that were judged to be active in PI<sup>1</sup>; and the number of partners listed on the MOU that were no longer considered partners by the key stakeholders we interviewed. The final columns of Table 2 indicate the total numbers of all partners in each community, the total of those partnerships that were considered active, and the total number of partners originally listed on MOUs that local informants did not judge to be involved with PI at the time our interviews were conducted.

**TABLE 5. YEAR TWO PARTNERSHIPS**

	<b>Federal Partners</b>			<b>State Partners</b>			<b>Local Partners</b>			<b>Total Partners</b>		
	Total	Active	Total Not A Partner	Total	Active	Total Not A Partner	Total	Active	Total Not A Partner	Total	Active	Total Not A Partner
Community 1	9	3	0	4	3	0	23	19	0	36	25	0
Community 2	2	2	0	8	6	0	24	21	0	34	29	0
Community 3	5	4	0	9	8	0	32	19	0	46	31	0
Community 4	4	4	0	2	2	0	21	21	0	27	27	0
Community 5	5	5	0	6	5	0	61	45	8	72	55	8
Community 6	8	4	0	3	3	0	30	21	0	41	28	0
Community 7	7	5	0	7	6	0	57	52	0	71	63	0
Totals	40	27	0	39	33	0	248	198	8	327	258	8

Communities reported an average of 5.7 federal partners, with a range of 2 to 9, of which an average of 3.8 were considered active. Interestingly, when communities had fewer federal partners, all of them were active. Communities with 7, 8 and 9 federal partners still had no more than 5 active federal partners. Communities had an average of 5.6 state partners, with a range of 2 to 9, of which an average of 4.7 were considered active. Like federal partners, when state organizations were considered partners, they were also judged to be active partners.

The largest number of partnership arrangements were found in the “local and non-governmental partners” category, a diverse group consisting both of local government agencies and of organizations representing the private and non-profit sectors. Communities reported having relationships with an average of 35.4 local and non-governmental partners, with a range of 21 to 61 partnerships, of which an average of 28.3 were considered active. Membership in this partnership category tended to be rather fluid. For example, in community 5, respondents reported that eight business organizations that had earlier been considered participants in PI were

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<sup>1</sup> Partners were considered “active” if any community informant rated them as moderately to highly involved with local PI activities.

in fact not involved at the time our Year 2 data were collected. However, that loss was more than offset, because the community had also gained a substantial number of partners that had previously not been involved with PI. Some communities, such as communities 2, 3, and 4, showed only slight increases in local and non-governmental partnerships, while other communities, such as communities 1, 5, 6, and 7, showed quite significant increases. Overall, Community 5 showed the most substantial increase in partnerships from the first to the second year. This increase was due to a very dynamic Project Impact coordinator whose strategy was to make meetings fun, provide as much PR as possible for the partners, and give partners a lot of personal attention so that they understood how much their contributions were appreciated.

Interestingly, neither the overall number of partners nor increases in partnerships were related to community size.

Regardless of their ranking, interviewees provided similar reasons to account for not successfully incorporating a broad spectrum of community groups in PI activities. Some examples of their reasons include that there were not enough resources to market PI to the entire community; that residents are still more aware of PI generally than they are of any specific program efforts; that there are major differences in focus among community groups, including cultural and language problems; that larger communities take longer to integrate; and that areas in the community that most recently experienced disaster effects have been the most active.

Many of the interviewees hoped that new, upcoming projects would be able to get more people involved. They also stated that it may take a substantial amount of time to get people to buy into a new concept like PI. The barriers they often mentioned had little to do with financial or resource barriers (with the exception of personnel time), and much more to do with social and cultural barriers that required new learning at a community level as well as at an individual level.

Partnership-Building Strategies. Since the development of partnerships is a cornerstone of the Project Impact initiative, it is important to learn more about how PI communities actually go about forming and sustaining partnerships. Interviewees in the seven pilot communities provided a considerable amount of information on partnering strategies. Based on that information, DRC identified three themes or dimensions of partnering: strategies for engaging or recruiting partners to join in PI activities; strategies for keeping partners involved once they elected to join; and ways of influencing partners to provide resources to the program.

Informants emphasized the idea that utilizing already-existing relationships is an efficient and effective means of recruiting partners. Additionally, once partners agreed to join PI, their own networks became a vehicle for further recruitment. That is, one main way of expanding partnerships is to encourage current partners to suggest others they think may be interested. It was also suggested that it helps to have a committee devoted to creating and sustaining partnership relations. Informants in several communities stated that publicizing PI widely is a good strategy for recruiting partners; the more exposure that Project Impact gets in the area, the more partners will want to participate. When the program is publicized, this encourages partners to seek out PI on their own since they can see the obvious benefits to the community and to

themselves. Along these same lines, media organizations were seen as important targets for partnering efforts, since the media can provide needed visibility for PI.

Communities reported struggling with the question of what should be asked of partners in the way of support. How much support is enough? What and how much should be given by partners? Many of the Project Impact Coordinators stated emphatically that smaller contributions from partners are as important--and in some cases more important--than larger contributions. In one community, partners contributed anything from sums of money to coffee at committee meetings. Some informants indicated it can be beneficial to ask for a smaller amount of support from partners, because then partners do not feel taxed. Asking a company to co-sponsor an event was a common way of recruiting partners. This strategy helped gain publicity for business partners while increasing Project Impact's reputation through association with credible businesses. Informants pointed out that is a good idea not to ask too much from any one partner. Rather, having a wide variety of partners with a range of resources is crucial.

Informants in Community 7 indicated that the community always tried to ask for specific donations when discussing a project with partners. For example, in order to plan a children's school activity, the community would ask for cardboard from one company, art supplies from another and scissors from another. This way, participation is broadened and partners can see directly where their money is going, rather than being asked for large sums without being given a clear idea of how those funds will be used.

One community, Community 4, felt unfairly criticized for having too few partners. This community actually did not increase its number of partnerships from the first to the second year. However, program participants explained that PI organizers wanted to have something specific for each partner to do. They did not want to ask a business to become involved in PI until there was an actual need for that particular company. Additionally, the community was reluctant to ask large numbers of partners to get involved with the program, out of a concern that individual businesses would not feel sufficiently involved.

The seven communities employed various strategies for maintaining active participation from their partners. It was common for communities to use partners to provide ideas about possible future projects or community events. Informants indicated that partners want to feel a part of the PI process and that they want to be asked about their expectations for PI. Other communities echoed this sentiment by pointing out that "partners should have a say in the project." Organizing creative kinds of projects was another key element in maintaining high interest and involvement. Regular meetings with the partners were also seen as important for maintaining their commitment since meetings provide an opportunity to open lines of communication with partners and help them feel included. Informants also stressed the importance of always thanking partners for any help that is given, whether that help is large or small.

Five general conclusions concerning partnerships can be drawn from this analysis:



1. Of the four goal areas, partnership-building has the lowest number of ongoing or completed activities.
2. However, communities see partnership-development and maintenance as an ongoing process and do not necessarily define it as a specified activity.
3. Both the overall number of partners and the number of active partners are increasing across the seven pilot communities. This increase is especially pronounced for local-level partnerships.
4. Communities are becoming more sophisticated in the identification of partners and are developing varied strategies to keep them actively involved.
5. Partnership activities are expanding to include a broader range of state and federal partners.

### **Status of Project Impact Public Education Activities**

The public education category includes any activities in which information was given to the public concerning hazards or risks and what can be done about them. These educational activities targeted a range of audiences, including professionals, organizations, and the general public. Some of the activities were focused on how to do mitigation, others targeted populations at risk, while still other activities aimed at promoting the adoption of preparedness measures. Specific public awareness initiatives documented in the pilot communities included developing preparedness programs, establishing a mentoring program between large and small businesses, carrying out various kinds of community disaster preparedness activities, conducting public awareness and training programs, and offering community mitigation training.

At the time the second year interviews were conducted, the pilot communities were engaged in 35 public education and information activities (see Table 4), all of which had begun or were identified during the first year of Project Impact. Of these, 31 are ongoing activities, and four have been completed. Individual communities reported involvement in two to nine ongoing education and public information activities, with an average of approximately four per community. The larger pilot communities are involved in more of these types of activities than are the smaller communities. While five public education activities are in the planning stages, four of those are in a single community. Planned activities were more often related to public information and education, with the exception of one mitigation training program. No communities decided against pursuing the activities they had planned in this area.

Two general conclusions can be drawn from the data that were obtained on public education:

1. Educational and information dissemination activities continue to be a major component of PI pilot community programs.
2. Public education initiatives span a range of topics: hazard awareness; preparedness strategies for homes and businesses; and the availability of services and supplies for mitigation and preparedness activities.

### **Progress Across Communities in the Four Major Project Impact Program Areas**

Since the ultimate purpose of Project Impact is to enhance the disaster resistance of communities to significant or extreme natural events, it is important to assess how well the pilot communities believe they are achieving this goal. Interviewees were asked to rate the extent to which their communities had adopted the concept of disaster resistance by incorporating it in planning, development, and construction processes. They were asked to use a 10-point scale where 1 indicated it had “not been incorporated at all,” while 10 meant it had been “totally incorporated” in community processes. The interviewees’ responses ranged from 3 to 9, with a mean of 6.3,

indicating that on the whole they believed the communities’ adoption of the disaster resistance concept is a little better than average, but could still be improved. Regardless of the rating they gave their own communities, informants’ responses reflected three common themes:

1. Communities had not yet made sufficient progress to completely integrate the concept into community-level policies and practices. Informants’ comments included: that PI needs to be part of daily life; that people know it’s important, but they may not be doing anything yet; and that change is beginning but has yet to be completed.
2. The situation is improving; that is, people were beginning to understand what the concept means and to see some possible benefits from its application. For example, one interviewee observed that, “A growing number of people in the community seem to know what ‘mitigation’ means.”
3. Strategies need to be identified to keep the communities moving toward this goal. Some of their comments mentioned making PI a part of people’s value systems; not pushing the program on people so much that they stop listening; and needing to reiterate the message about PI over and over.

To summarize our earlier discussion, looking across all four program elements, a substantial number of activities have been initiated or completed in the areas of risk and vulnerability assessments (N = 41), mitigation (N = 35), and public education and information (N = 35). Partnership activities (N = 18), although fewer in number, are perceived as vital to the process of

community development. Since risk and vulnerability assessments constitute an important first step in reducing vulnerability, it is logical that a considerable amount of emphasis is being placed on risk assessment at this stage in the development of the Project Impact program.

Five broad conclusions can be drawn from a review of the findings on the four program elements:

1. Impressive changes have been made in the pilot communities in less than two years, with respect to both the number of projects in all four program elements and the number of new, more active partners that have been involved in PI activities.
2. Larger communities have more ongoing hazard/risk assessment and mitigation activities; but smaller communities have completed more of these activities.
3. Educational and information dissemination activities are favored by communities since they provide avenues to reach the general community.
4. There are major challenges for all of the communities in their ability to attract and incorporate diverse sectors of the community into PI.
5. There is a general optimism that the need for enhancing disaster resistance is permeating the communities and will increase in the future.

It is very important that these findings be understood in context. Project Impact represents an effort to change significantly both attitudes and behavior with respect to loss reduction, from an emphasis on preparedness, response, and recovery to an emphasis on long-range investments and community mobilization designed to mitigate future losses. PI is a very new program; and clearly these kinds of changes can only come about through sustained efforts over time. Seen in that light, the changes observed in the pilot communities do indicate significant progress.

### **Project Impact Management Structures**

In the research literature, organizational structures and decision making processes are often viewed as keys to the successful achievement of organizational goals and objectives. Certain types of structures are also known to work better than others in accomplishing particular kinds of tasks and in motivating people to work toward organizational goals. For these reasons, DRC focused both on the structure of PI programs and on modes of program decision-making in the seven pilot communities.

**Decision-Making Structures.** Communities were characterized as having **centralized** decision-making structures if they had established or identified a core group that could make decisions concerning what PI activities would be undertaken and what strategies would be pursued. In contrast, a community with a **decentralized** structure may also have a core decision-

making group, such as a steering/coordination committee or executive council. However, in these communities, other sub-committees or task groups often generate and execute their own activities, without the need for “formal” approval from the core group. In other words, although the core group is informed about the activities of subgroups and provides overall guidance, subgroups are able to initiate projects and activities on their own, without central direction.

**Organizational Structures.** Project Impact sites with **hierarchical** organizational structures have fairly elaborate organizations, typically comprised of a core group, a variety of task groups or sub-committees (which may be further subdivided according to specific project tasks), and some staff or liaison members. Often the PI organization is located within some unit of local government, and the PI coordinator must report to others before taking on major new initiatives or being able to incorporate personnel into PI activities. A **flat** organizational structure is one that has fewer organizational levels or layers, that does not have a steering committee, but that may have a series of task groups, each deciding upon its own agenda and carrying out its own activities.

Figure 1 classifies PI communities along these two dimensions. As shown in the figure, four of the seven communities have developed hierarchical organizational structures in which decision-making is decentralized. Two communities are organized non-hierarchically; in one community, decision-making is centralized, and in the other it is decentralized. Only one community has developed both a hierarchical structure and a centralized approach to decision-making.

These differences in program organization and modes of decision-making warrant emphasis because of their potential impact on program activities and effectiveness. Different organizational forms have different strengths and weaknesses. For example, while hierarchical forms of organization can promote accountability, they can also discourage innovation or fail to promote deep organizational involvement. Flat organizational structures tend to be more satisfying for those who take part in organizational activities, because it tends to be easier to gain access to people in key positions. Centralized decision-making structures can work well when a single individual or office has the authority to require others to perform, but are less effective when entities are participating in an activity voluntarily or where formal lines of authority do not exist. Based on the research literature, less centralized decision-making processes seem most appropriate for Project Impact, because the program attempts to bring together diverse community actors, each with their own resources, personnel, and specialized expertise, and because no single entity has the authority to compel others to take part in the program. And indeed these are the types of structures that DRC has found to be most common in Project Impact communities.

#### **FIGURE 1: MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES IN PROJECT IMPACT PILOT COMMUNITIES**

## DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY

		Centralized	Decentralized
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	Hierarchical	1  (Community 7)	4  (Community 1,2,5,6)
	Flat	1  (Community 4)	1  (Community 3)

To provide more detail, we next briefly summarize the organizational arrangements that have developed in the seven pilot communities.

Community 7 is the only community that has a hierarchical organizational structure and centralized decision-making. This community has a formalized 14-person steering committee (now referred to as the Executive Council) with seven members from one county and seven members from another county. All the members of the Executive Council are volunteers and very active in the community. The Executive Council meets once a month, alternating the counties in which the meeting is held. There are four subcommittees of this central steering committee: Risk Assessment and Hazards Mitigation Planning, Finance, Public Information, and Partnership Development. Decisions about what projects to undertake are suggested by the Steering Committee are carried out under the direction of the PI Coordinator.

Communities 1,2,5, and 6 exhibit the most common organizational form--a hierarchical structure combined with decentralized decision-making authority. Community 1 has an Oversight Committee made up of the pre-existing Emergency Management Board. This entity serves as the PI steering committee. There are five subcommittees, all of which existed prior to the time PI was established. Those task-specific subcommittees, which have separate chairs, are: Community Assessment and Review Taskforce, Public Education and Vocational Training Taskforce, Business and Industry Advisory Taskforce, Technical Standards Advisory Taskforce, and the Promotion and Outreach Taskforce.. While there is a strong coordinating presence from the emergency manager, who reports directly to the City Manager, the subcommittees carry out their own activities relatively independently.

Community 2 already had an existing Emergency Coordinating Committee (the ECC, established in 1981 with 47 members) prior to joining Project Impact. The ECC includes 29 municipalities in the county as well as various public and private organizations. For PI, the community developed a Mitigation Task Force whose members were chosen by the ECC. This new task force functions as a subcommittee of the ECC. The Task Force has 19 members divided into three smaller subcommittees: Education and Training, Infrastructure and Planning, Business/Private Enterprise. Unlike other subcommittees of the ECC, however, the Mitigation Task Force also reports directly to the City Manager who is responsible for Project Impact. The three subcommittees develop their own projects and carry them out.

In developing its Steering Committee, Community 5 recruited members from the existing local and emergency planning committee. This site also focused on various vital facilities (e.g., hospitals), as well as “communities within communities,” such as the University and the beach area, as it made decisions about choosing representatives to work on the steering committee. However, the bulk of the commitment and responsibility for the program remain with the emergency management office. In the second year, the Steering Committee was functioning well, with four subcommittees comprised of approximately 100 people: Hazard Analysis; Mitigation Planning; Financial Issues; and Public Awareness (which has its own subcommittee, the Children’s Awareness Task Force). Each subcommittee has a chair and meets quarterly.

In Community 6, the PI initial organizing group was pulled together by the emergency management staff who invited people and groups, some of whom already had some association with earthquake or disaster issues. For example, a pre-existing business continuity support group that dealt with business emergency management issues attended. This large group evolved into four committees in the first year of the community’s involvement in PI, each of which then developed its own subcommittees to work on different aspects of the project. Those committees were developed around specific projects and included: a school mitigation project; a home retrofit project; a GIS vulnerability mapping project; and a future projects group. Each project committee had its own chair who oversaw the work of that project group. In the second year, two new committees developed—project standards and public outreach—and one committee, the schools project, began to wind down. Once the project groups were established, they began to carry out their functions independently and add subcommittees as they identify needs for them.

Community 4, which has a flat organizational structure and uses a centralized approach to decision-making, has no formal steering committee. Instead, a Hazard Mitigation Committee, made up of city employees, community members, business leaders, and representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, has the authority to make all program decisions.

Community 3, which has a flat organizational structure and employs a decentralized mode of making decisions, also has no steering committee. There are, instead, eight work groups, each with its own chairperson. These work groups perform the functions of task forces or subcommittees in other PI communities. These work groups are very active, focusing on the following areas: Education; Flood-proofing; Communications; Flood Plain Land Use; Flood

Insurance; Partnership Development; Mitigation; and Hazard Identification and Acquisition. The work groups consist of a mix of people from local and state agencies, business representatives, and residents from the community. Most committee chairs are government officials appointed by the Director of Planning. The chairs of the work groups meet quarterly to exchange information and report on their activities, which are carried out independently. In addition to the quarterly meetings attended by committee chairs, the workgroups also hold regular meetings. Work groups support one another's activities and frequently work beyond the scope of their designated areas of responsibility. Groups often work cooperatively, a type of interaction that is encouraged.

In summary, we found that a hierarchical structure with decentralized decision-making authority was the most frequent type of management system used by the pilot communities. However, it should also be noted that the communities using this system were generally the largest communities that also had pre-existing organizations that formed the basis of the new PI program. Smaller, more rural communities, developed different management systems, perhaps reflecting their own political operations and the availability of resources to undertake PI activities. Given these findings, we can not make recommendations concerning the efficiency or effectiveness of any one organizational or decision-making form. We do believe, however, that making new PI communities aware of these different modes of program organization and how they tend to operate may assist them in analyzing their own organizational structures to determine which approach may best suit their own needs and local conditions.

### **The Effects of Recent Disasters on Project Impact Communities**

The seven communities in this study were chosen as PI pilot communities in part because of their disaster vulnerability, and in some cases because of their recent disaster experience. Thus it was not surprising that three of the pilot communities experienced threats, near misses, or direct hits in the period since they were designated PI communities. In 1998, Hurricane Georges threatened Deerfield Beach, Florida and hit Pascagoula, Mississippi. During this past hurricane season, both Hurricane Bonnie and Hurricane Floyd hit New Hanover County, North Carolina.

Deerfield Beach activated its emergency response organization when the community was threatened by Hurricane Georges. What one informant referred to as the "scare with Hurricane Georges" left tree limbs and wires down and caused some beach erosion. Interviewees were asked whether this non-damaging near miss had an effect on people's concerns about the need to decrease the community's vulnerability. Interviewees do not believe that the hurricane slowed enthusiasm for Project Impact but, rather, actually may have created more concern about increasing mitigation activities.

In Pascagoula, respondents felt that because of PI, preparedness activities had increased by the time Hurricane Georges occurred. They also noted that community participation at a subsequent hurricane fair was greater than it would have been without Hurricane Georges. However, while the hurricane did heighten awareness of PI within the community, it also reportedly delayed PI activities due to the need to recover from the hurricane's impacts.

One obvious question is whether involvement in PI helped communities handle threats and disasters more effectively. Only one study community, New Hanover County, was far enough along in PI for the program to have an impact on community response during the last hurricane season. According to our informants, Hurricane Bonnie highlighted both community strengths and weaknesses. For example, the change in residential building codes helped elevate more homes, thereby reducing damage; and the LP Gas Tank Ordinance prevented tanks from becoming debris hazards in flooded areas. Also, the community recognized a need for generator capability in many structures, as well as the need to retrofit an old communications tower that could act as a back-up for the existing tower. Interestingly one respondent felt that Hurricane Bonnie did help to spread awareness of Project Impact, but that same respondent worried that the progress made by the program could be destroyed by a truly extreme hurricane—for example, a storm of the magnitude of Hurricane Andrew could be destructive regardless the mitigation measures taken. In general, however, communities believe that experiencing a disaster event or threat helps maintain program momentum.

In 1999, the same community was hit by Hurricane Floyd, and again there were some very interesting successes that need to be shared with other communities. One example is the success of the community's Spanish Disaster Hotline. In the community's past, very few Latinos had used emergency shelters; but following Hurricane Floyd, 85% of one of the shelters was comprised of Latinos. The county attributes this success to the fact that many of the Latinos told shelter workers that they felt welcome and comfortable coming into the shelter when the information about the shelter was communicated to them in their own language. The community also pointed to other PI activities that had proven successful, such as mitigation measures instituted at the local water plant, elevated homes, and information dissemination to minority communities on hurricane preparedness. Nevertheless, after Hurricane Floyd severe flooding did cause damage to the foundation of the communications tower that had been retrofit to resist wind damage when water seeped up from underneath.

Repeatedly, DRC researchers have heard from PI community leaders (including those that came into the program after the pilot communities) that it would be necessary to have a disaster hit their communities in order to focus attention on the need to support mitigation activities. Three of the pilot communities experienced disasters within the past two years. In these three communities, the disaster event or its near-miss did have the effect of heightening concerns about increased vulnerability reduction for the community. It also enabled the communities to assess the extent to which PI and other mitigation activities were effective. But there was also a down-side in that the momentum of PI activities was interrupted by the need to respond to and recover from the actual disaster events. In one case this was only a minor deviation; however, in two other communities that sustained much more damaging impacts, it took considerable time to return to some of the basic PI goal activities—especially those involving education, information dissemination, and partnership development. While it would be possible to build these activities into the recovery process, more urgent needs consumed human and material resources needed to recover.



## **The Effects of Political and Economic Changes on Project Impact**

Many political changes occurred in the pilot communities between the first and second year. In four of the communities county administrators, county commissioners, mayors, and new city council representatives have been elected. In one community, part of the county was annexed by the city, which had not previously been an enthusiastic supporter of PI. Another PI community experienced reorganization and the consolidation of a number of government functions. An interviewee in a third community observed that PI is now considered less of a community priority than it had been previously. In another community, a campaign of creating land use and building policies that was directly tied PI goals resulted in one politician being voted out of office.

Clearly, like any other community program, PI is not immune from changes in the local political climate. Because PI has not yet been institutionalized at the local level in the same way that many other programs are, it may be especially vulnerable when a new party assumes power, when personnel change, or when government reorganizations take place. PI may also need additional resources to weather the vicissitude of local politics. At the same time, if PI activities are well-funded, well-supported by political influentials, and well-publicized, the program should be in a good position to attract political support. As with any new initiative, the challenge is to secure a place on the local political agenda for PI so that activities and partnerships continue regardless of party and personnel shifts that may occur.

Regarding economic influences on the program, large businesses announced layoffs and relocations in three of the pilot communities. While these occurrences did not affect PI on a global level as much as the political changes, they could possibly affect PI indirectly. When businesses close or relocate, partners are lost. Similarly, when people lose their jobs due to downsizing, they are likely to be more preoccupied with finding new employment and obtaining basic necessities and less inclined to invest in hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness.

Clearly, there is no way to prevent these types of changes from affecting the PI programs in each community. In fact, the philosophy of PI, which stresses local management and community development, may make the program even more exposed to these local-level stressors. However, Project Impact is still in its formative phase of development; and the institutionalization of the concept of disaster resistance will take some time to establish itself within the culture of local communities. Cultural and institutional change are difficult to bring about; and only with sustained effort over a period of time could the concept of disaster resistance become less influenced by individual events.

## **Leveraging**

The concept of leveraging resources is central to the philosophy of PI. Leveraging is important not only for sustaining and expanding the program in the near term, but also for the attainment of PI's ultimate goal, which is to increase significantly involvement and investment in community

disaster resistance. Community informants sometimes had difficulty articulating exactly what leveraging meant to them, and they were also unclear at times about what constitute good leveraging strategies. However, from what they discussed in interviews, it was possible to identify three main dimensions or aspects of leveraging. Those were: leveraging funds to obtain higher levels of funding; leveraging partnerships to increase the number of partners involved in the program and also to obtain needed resources; and leveraging the concept of disaster resistance beyond PI funding.

Fund leveraging strategies that were identified by interviewees included using FEMA money to bring in more money from partners, pulling resources together to obtain matching funds for grants, combining projects and funding from other agencies so as to receive more money in return, and using funds from different sources, such as donations and state government. In another important fund-leveraging strategy, communities also leveraged Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds when they were available. Partnership leveraging strategies mentioned by interviewees included recruiting new federal and state agencies to help provide technical assistance and other resources, making special efforts to involve a wide variety of community organizations in PI, and formalizing opportunities for interaction among partners.

Interviewees also talked about the importance of ensuring the continued survival of local initiatives after PI-specific funds have been expended. "Leveraging-for-the-future" activities that communities have undertaken include developing promotional activities and materials, devising ways of soliciting residents' views on future mitigation projects, identifying programs that could serve as future funding sources, and developing multi-year mitigation programs that mix short-term and longer-term objectives.

Communities have shown a great deal of creativity in their leveraging efforts. The kinds of resources the communities have leveraged include: computer logo designs; contributed time; building materials; network contacts; professional services; momentum achieved through other projects; community activities such as fairs, festivals, cook offs, expos and plays; public relations and media attention; advertisements; educational materials; private vulnerability assessments; discounts from hardware and food stores; and cash.

### **Momentum and Creativity**

Concerns about developing momentum for PI-related activities during the first year have transformed in the second year into concerns about how to sustain momentum. While all of the pilot communities mentioned the enthusiasm that surrounded the signing ceremonies in their first year, some of the community informants referred to the difficulties they had following that media event, principally because no structure was in place to take advantage of it. This year, our informants' comments focused more on the strategies they were using to sustain the momentum they had regained after they began initiating projects in their first year.

Increasing the visibility of PI and increasing the involvement of key community sectors are two general strategies that are being used to build and sustain momentum in the pilot communities. Hazard-related expositions and fairs were commonly mentioned as ways of increasing PI visibility. These events, held on an annual or bi-annual basis, helped spread awareness of Project Impact to the private sector and the general public. They also attracted media attention which, in turn, further increased Project Impact's visibility. Several other initiatives that raised Project Impact's visibility included weekly television shows, weekly newspaper columns, radio advertisements, utility bill inserts, the distribution of pamphlets and hazard-maps, and presentations that were made at civic clubs. In one community, PI co-sponsored a TV show that was broadcast to the entire state on the anniversary of a major disaster. The key to a successful strategy for increasing visibility appears to be consistently using a variety of techniques to keep PI in the news.

Interviewees stated that early community involvement and getting projects initiated rapidly were vital to creating and sustaining momentum. Partners need to see that projects are actually underway. It is also crucial that the activities that are selected for emphasis are seen as beneficial to private partners in order to encourage and maintain their continued involvement. Study respondents stressed the importance of consistent partner attendance at regular meetings, noting that incentives such as recognition awards and free lunches are sometimes needed to encourage attendance. One community has also tried to involve the public by providing a forum for feedback about Project Impact mitigation activities at town meetings.

Another way to sustain momentum is to team up with other organizations and initiatives already in place, partnering new activities with existing ones. For example, the fact that the Project Impact office is often located in departments such as Emergency Management allowed the initiative to combine its efforts with existing disaster-related public education and community outreach activities. Interviewees also reported taking advantage of business interests in Y2K preparedness to promote mitigation and private sector involvement.

Success in building momentum was often attributed to the presence of an active Project Impact coordinator. The program coordinator is clearly central to any effort to move the program forward. In cases where coordinators have been less active, where the position has been filled by different people or allowed to remain vacant, or where PI responsibilities were added to other existing duties the coordinator already had, there often has been a loss of momentum, and partners have begun to lose interest in and commitment to PI.

While both of these strategies were important, they required a great deal of creativity on the part of both the PI Coordinator and those actively involved in the program to identify innovative ways to bring attention to the program, get more organizations involved, and people to understand the disaster-resistance concept. When asked to give examples of creative ideas that they had undertaken during their second year, the interviewees mentioned many of the same activities associated with the goal areas, for example: risk assessments, the retrofitting of certain types of buildings or structures, improving the community's CRS rating, and developing public education

initiatives. Although these activities are not novel ideas, they were seen by our informants as creative because they had not previously been tried in those particular communities.

What was particularly creative, however, was the use of innovative strategies—particularly in the area of public education and partnering to achieve Project Impact goals. In one community, actors and drama groups focused educational efforts on children and the elderly by presenting skits on mitigation and preparedness directed toward those age groups. Disaster fairs and expos also provided special opportunities to inform the community at large about Project Impact, while at the same time partnering with businesses. Occasionally these events provided the business community with opportunities to advertise their products and services while, at the same time, served as fund-raising events for PI through participation fees paid by the vendors for display space. As outreach events, these fairs and expos not only educated community residents about the types of preparedness and mitigation actions they could take to protect their own property but also brought new partners to the community who had a direct economic interest in seeing Project Impact activities take root in the community.

What was surprising was that almost no mention was made of innovative policy development or strategies to influence the policy process. Clearly, the institutionalization of PI goals, especially those related to mitigation, will require active involvement in the policy arena. There could be many reasons for this oversight: it may still be too early in the history of PI for its supporters to think about creative ways to influence policy; the people in decision-making roles in PI programs may not feel that the policy arena is where their efforts need to be focused; or guidance on ways to influence policies may be lacking, since most PI activities are focused on “projects” with tangible products rather than on processes. Whatever the reasons, a great deal of thought should be given to how to develop momentum on activities that can lead to new policies and practices in PI communities, perhaps through innovative new guidance for the communities.

## **Lessons Learned**

Respondents in the pilot communities were asked to reflect on their experiences with Project Impact and to identify what they had learned during the past two years that could assist newer communities now being included in Project Impact. Their “lessons learned” covered three major areas: goal-setting, structure, and community participation.

**Goal-setting** emerged as the most important topic across the pilot communities. Interviewees made it clear that Project Impact must be viewed as an ongoing, long-term process. They advised that newer communities should look not only at the short-term benefits of this program, but also take into consideration the long-term change needed in the community to achieve PI’s overall goals and objectives of disaster resistance. Most communities took the approach of starting with numerous smaller projects instead of focusing on a few larger activities. Larger projects developed in conjunction with efforts already underway in a few of the communities. What was

important, however, was the development of a formal plan that prioritized activities the community really wanted to implement; yet the plan had to remain sufficiently flexible to adapt to new opportunities or changes in conditions (for example, changes in political support) over time.

Several people interviewed emphasized the “community knows best” philosophy; that is, a community knows what is best for itself because of its unique history, political dynamics and experience with disaster events and mitigation activities. Some communities cautioned that what works well in one community might not work at all in another. Despite the perception that FEMA was pressing communities to conform to similar processes or types of activities, our interviewees stressed the importance of developing a local-level plan and set of objectives. While some PI administrators at FEMA have expressed this same sentiment concerning the need for community-based decision making, there is still some confusion—especially between regional offices and the communities—about the extent to which a local community can identify its own goals and projects. This sometimes laborious procedure frustrates communities and delays their access to obtaining funds to initiate their projects.

In many communities, even the Project Impact terminology was not worked well. For example, the term “mitigation” was often not understood by partners or by the general public; but other concepts, such as “prevention,” were more effective in conveying the Project Impact message. Also, because of the fluidity of membership on many of the working committees in PI communities (that is, members don’t always come to each meeting, or different designees are sent instead of the member), it was suggested that committees need to reaffirm and articulate their goals and tasks at each meeting. This type of process would not only make the work of the committee more productive but would also develop a wider understanding of the community’s goals with respect to PI.

Differences in the **structure** and functioning of PI constituted another major lesson. Several respondents felt that Project Impact would be better located in the City or County manager’s office instead of in an emergency management office. This is principally because in many communities, local emergency management agencies are located within response organizations (for example, a fire department, or a police or sheriff’s department), and their personnel often have few opportunities to interact with their counterparts other community agencies (e.g., planning, building and safety, economic development) that have responsibilities in areas more closely related to mitigation. Also, when their positions are located within traditionally response-oriented organizations, emergency managers frequently have little direct access to decisionmakers such as city or county managers, whose influence and support may be crucial to the success of Project Impact.

Respondents warned that communities should have in place some form of management structure to administer Project Impact before becoming involved with the project. The individuals involved in the PI management system should not underestimate the amount of time, especially in the first year or so, that is required to establish a good plan, thoughtful projects, and the development of momentum in the community. Similarly, communities should be prepared for more resource

needs, particularly in terms of staff time, than they might originally have anticipated.

Obviously, active **community participation** is essential for PI success. Our interviewees feel strongly that the solutions to disaster resistance must be generated locally. Instead of turning first to FEMA, these respondents encouraged local Project Impact organizers to turn inward, to the private sector, community neighborhoods, and volunteer groups for solutions. Respondents mentioned a number of lessons they have learned concerning how to involve the local community in Project Impact planning. First, a receptive environment must be created to allow for the emergence of creative ideas. Partners and steering committee members must not be afraid to make suggestions. Also, mechanisms must be created to solicit ideas from the citizenry, and PI managers should pay attention to these ideas. Those most involved in the projects' steering committees must seek feedback from all segments of the community in order to identify issues that have been overlooked or need improvement. Even if suggested activities seem silly or difficult at first glance, they may be an innovative way to address a local problem and should be given some consideration.

PI organizers must seek out partners who are not normally approached or typically involved in disaster-related activities in the community, especially if they can play a meaningful role in projects that are being planned. In this way, partners don't feel as though their time is being wasted or that they have only been asked to participate because of their "deep pockets." To prevent this from occurring, some respondents suggested that Project Impact organizers know what they want from partners before signing them on. Also, many interviewees felt that state agencies should be involved as early as possible in PI because of the resources they can bring to the communities, especially in terms of expertise. Since FEMA specifically wants to interact directly with local communities concerning PI, the communities must make purposive efforts to involve their states in PI activities.

## **Global Issues**

In DRC's evaluation of the seven pilot communities' first year, some global issues were identified by community informants during the course of our interviews and field trips. Often, these issues related to the challenges communities face, to their relationships with FEMA, or to other processes that impact on the communities' ability to vigorously pursue the disaster-resistance concept. Discussed briefly below are some key issues that continue to be a focus of concern in the seven pilot sites.

1. In the second year of the program, some of the pilot communities continue to have problems in their relationships with their states' emergency management organizations (EMO's).

Last year, many community informants noted that FEMA appeared to lack sensitivity concerning

the complexity of relationships between cities and counties, or between local and state governments. Much of this initial disregard for local governmental contexts and dynamics, it was believed, resulted in strained relationships between the pilot communities and their states. Some of this strain continues in the second year. For example, one community still believes it is being penalized by the state's EMO because it was designated as a PI community without endorsement from the state. In at least three other communities, difficulties have also been experienced in working with the state on mitigation projects when the state's approval of the project was necessary. One community interviewee stated that there is still a lack of communication from the state EMO.

During the second year of this program, FEMA has taken steps to bring states (including those in which the newer PI communities are located) into the Project Impact process more formally by asking them to identify candidate PI communities and by being given some funding to work with the PI communities. While the pilot communities still report some problems, our interviewees expressed the view that FEMA personnel now have a better understanding of these local dynamics and are trying to correct this problem. However, distrust of the Federal government and federal programs is still high in some communities for historical reasons. Fortunately, with respect to Project Impact, our informants felt that the level of distrust was not as pronounced as it had been a year ago.

2. The clarification of Project Impact objectives and procedures within FEMA is still an issue in the second year.

According to our interviewees, there continues to be confusion concerning what projects or activities communities can undertake under the auspices of PI. Most of the confusion occurs between regional representatives and the communities. On one hand, PI communities are encouraged by FEMA's national headquarters to identify and prioritize their own activities; while, on the other hand, regional offices often reject their proposals. It seemed to some interviewees that regional representatives may not know what can and cannot be included as a PI project.

Some of the regional offices seem to have more difficulties with their communities than do others. For example, one community representative said, "It was hard to work with Region Z because they have a different view of the scope of PI." Another respondent stated that a regional FEMA office tried to "slip in" projects that the community did not want to undertake either due to cost or its low prioritization. This led to the perception that FEMA had pre-conceived ideas about what it wanted to see accomplished around the country, rather than taking into account the variability between communities (especially in terms of structure, size, and political context).

This situation does seem to have improved significantly, however, in Year 2. Lack of consistency and clarity in communications with FEMA and the regions does not appear to be as great a problem at this point, as illustrated by the comment made by one interviewee that FEMA National

and the regions seem to have better communication now. However, it is felt that more specific guidance with respect to the types of activities local communities can undertake would still be useful for regions, especially those newer to the process.

3. The rapid expenditure of money seems premature to some pilot communities.

One of the common themes mentioned by our informants involved the perception of being pressured to spend PI funds quickly. This was especially frustrating to the communities that had their first requests for project approval turned down, followed by lengthy negotiations about what would be done. Some communities also wanted to take a cautious approach to spending their money by going through a well thought out planning process and then undertaking risk assessments before deciding on mitigation projects. In those communities, informants expressed the belief that the communities were being pressured to do “bricks and mortar” projects in order to have tangible mitigation projects completed. In other communities, it was a difficult, lengthy process to arrive at a consensus about what should be done and in what order.

These PI communities had received a large amount of money to enhance their disaster resistance, and they did not want to use these funds unwisely or precipitously. Their main concern was how best to use these non-recurring funds. Clearly, considerable emphasis should be placed on understanding how best to balance the need to demonstrate tangible results in the short term with the communities’ desires to use funds wisely to truly enhance their long-term resistance to future disasters.



## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Discussion Questions**

## PROJECT IMPACT (PI) DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your job title and what do you do?
2. In general, have there been any major changes in [NAME OF COMMUNITY] in the past year? For example, have new politicians been elected, have any chief administrators changed, have any new businesses come into the community, have any major employers left or scaled back, have you had a disaster?
3. The last time we spoke, your community was already taking some actions to become more disaster resistant even before becoming a PI community. Please get out Part 1 of the packet that was mailed to you with the title, "Mitigation Actions for [NAME OF COMMUNITY]." Is there anything specific you would like to tell me about these activities that we did not ask?
4. Now let us turn to Part 2 of the packet of questions we sent to you. When we last interviewed in your community, these activities had not been started in year one. Is there anything more you would like to tell me about these activities?
5. Please take out Part 3 of the packet that was mailed to you with the title, "Status of Project Impact Activities for [NAME OF COMMUNITY]. These were activities your community identified in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and in the first Statement of Work (SOW). We are interested in progress or changes to these earlier plans.
6. Please see Part 4 of the packet we sent you:
  - A. What strategies or methods have you used to develop partnerships (with the private sector, state and federal agencies), and how well have they worked to meet your community's Project Impact goals?
  - B. Are there any other organizations or people you feel could make a contribution to PI, but have not been recruited?
  - C. What are the most important resources your partners are providing (e.g., time, technology, personnel, skills, money, materials, audiences, etc)?

Now, let me ask you a few questions about what has been going on since our last visit to your community in April, 1998.

7. Have there been any new Project Impact activities that were not in your original MOA or SOW or that were continued from last year?
8. When we visited you last year, you were setting up the organizational structures for PI in your community. Is the same structure still in place or has it changed?

9. Is your community doing anything you consider to be creative with respect to Project Impact goals, processes and projects that you think could be useful to other communities? Just give me the top 2 or 3 ideas.
10. What strategies or methods has your community used to sustain momentum toward building a disaster resistant community, that is, keep the concept of disaster resistance in front of your community and to give groups ideas about what they can do?
11. Since we last interviewed you approximately a year ago what additional "highlights" or benefits has [NAME OF COMMUNITY] received from its involvement in Project Impact?
12. Now that you have had at least a year of experience being a Project Impact community, what major "lessons" have been learned that could help other new local governments being brought into the program today?
13. From your perspective, what have been the major problems or challenges you have experienced in working on Project Impact in [NAME OF COMMUNITY]?
14. How can the integration process, across your community, be enhanced; that is, how can the PI message be expanded to all segments of the community in a meaningful way?
15. Other than what we have already discussed, are there any resources that would help you meet your PI goals in the coming years?
16. Many of the PI materials FEMA has made available to participating communities refers to the need to "leverage" PI funding for projects. What specifically does this term mean to you? And how has your community tried to leverage its FEMA funding for PI?
17. The seven PI pilot communities are getting project money at different times and in different amounts. Could you tell me how much "real" money [NAME OF COMMUNITY] has received to date and how much of it has currently been spent?
18. Communities have had different experiences with PI-- some good, some less good. On a scale from 1 to 10 how far do you think your community has come to think of PI as a good tool for mitigation? (1 = "NOT GOOD AT ALL"; 10 = "VERY GOOD")
19. One of the goals of PI was to make disaster resistance part of local culture. On a scale from 1 TO 10 (1= "VERY LITTLE", 10 = "A GREAT DEAL"), how much do you think your community has thoroughly adopted the concept of disaster resistance in terms of planning, development and mitigation?
20. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = "VERY LITTLE", 10 = "A GREAT DEAL"), what is the extent of your total community's involvement in PI activities? By this we mean, the entire community.

21. Is there anyone else in your community who you think we should speak with to get more information or different views on PI?

22. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences with the Project Impact program?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Year Two Interview Schedule**

**PROJECT IMPACT STUDY**  
**YEAR 2 CONTINUATION**  
**COMMUNITY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

1. (IS THIS A RE-INTERVIEW? IF NO, go to "A." IF YES, go to "B.")

A. If no, ask: What is your job title and what do you do?

B. If yes, ask: When we spoke with you last year, your position in the (CITY/COUNTY) was

\_\_\_\_\_ (PRE-FILL)

\_\_\_\_\_

C. Has your title changed since the last time we spoke to you? (IF YES, WHAT IS YOUR TITLE NOW AND WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?)

2. In general, have there been any major changes in (CITY/COUNTY) in the past year? For example, have new politicians been elected, have any chief administrators changed, have any new businesses come into the community, have any major employers left or scaled back, have you had a disaster? (IF "YES": WHAT HAPPENED AND HAS THIS CHANGE AFFECTED PROJECT IMPACT?)

Change #1: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Change #2: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Change #3: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. The last time we spoke, your community was already taking some actions to become more disaster resistant even before becoming a PI community. Please get out Part 1 of the packet that was mailed to you with the title, "Mitigation Actions for (CITY/COUNTY)." Is there anything specific you would like to tell me about these activities that we did not ask? (INTERVIEWERS SEE SHEET THAT WAS FAXED BACK AND ASK ANY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS).

A. INTERVIEWER NOTE: THERE ARE NO PROBES FOR SECTION "A."

B. PROBES FOR "B": IF "OTHER" FUNDING SOURCE, WHAT?

C. PROBES FOR "C": IF "NOT AT ALL (1)", WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

4. Now let us turn to Part 2 of the packet of questions we sent to you. When we last interviewed in your community, these activities had not been started in year one. Is there anything more you would like to tell me about these activities? (INTERVIEWERS SEE SHEET THAT WAS FAXED BACK AND ASK ANY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS).



A. PROBE FOR "A": IF CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED, "WHY?"

B. PROBES FOR "B": IF "OTHER" FUNDING SOURCE, WHAT?

C. PROBES FOR "C": IF "NOT AT ALL (1)", WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

5. Please take out Part 3 of the packet that was mailed to you with the title, "Project Impact Activities For (CITY/COUNTY). These were activities your community identified in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and in the first Statement of Work (SOW). We are interested in progress or changes to these earlier plans. (INTERVIEWERS SEE PROJECT IMPACT ACTIVITY SHEET THAT WAS FAXED BACK AND ASK ANY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS).

A. PROBE for "A" - "DECIDED NOT TO PURSUE", ask: "Why not?"

B. PROBE for "A" - "BEGUN OR ON-GOING", ask: "Are there any problems that have hindered the completion of these tasks? (TAKE ONE AT A TIME).

C. PROBE for "A" - "COMPLETED", ask: "Has the outcome of this activity been integrated or incorporated into community organizations or agencies on a permanent or ongoing basis? What benefits have resulted?

6. Please see Part 4 of the packet we sent you. (INTERVIEWERS SEE LIST OF PARTNERS SHEET).

A. What strategies or methods have you used to develop partnerships (with the private sector, state and federal agencies), and how well have they worked to meet your community's Project Impact goals? (PROBE: New partners added? Success in keeping partners?).

B. Are there any other organizations or people you feel could make a contribution to PI, but have not been recruited? (PROBE: Why?)

C. What are the most important resources your partners are providing (PROBE: time, technology, personnel, skills, money, materials, audiences, etc)?

NOW, let me ask you a few questions about what has been going on since our last visit to your community in \_\_\_\_\_, 1998.

7. Have there been any new Project Impact activities that were not in your original MOA or SOW or that were continued from last year? (INTERVIEWER: GRID OF NEW ACTIVITIES. PROBE: Status and responsible organization).

8. When we visited you last year, you were setting up the organizational structures for PI in your community— At that time [DESCRIBE STRUCTURE]. Is this still in place, has it changed?  
(PROBE: If changed, how?)

PI STRUCTURE (PRE-FILL) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Is your community doing anything you consider to be **creative** with respect to Project Impact goals, processes and projects that you think could be useful to other communities? Just give me the top 2 or 3 ideas.

IDEA #1 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

IDEA#2 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

IDEA#3 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What strategies or methods has your community used to sustain momentum toward building a disaster resistant community, that is, keep the concept of disaster resistance in front of this community and to give groups ideas about what they can do (PROBE: including but not limited to: efforts from the private sector; local regulatory changes; new local programs; assistance from FEMA, other federal agencies or state agencies)?

11. Since we last interviewed you approximately a year ago what additional “highlights” or benefits has (CITY/COUNTY NAME) received from its involvement in Project Impact?

12. Now that you have had at least a year of experience being a Project Impact community, what major "lessons" have been learned that could help other new local governments being brought into the program today?

PROBE: Anything to avoid? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What would you do differently? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What should others be expecting? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Would you do it again? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. From your perspective, what have been the major problems or challenges you have experienced in working on Project Impact in (CITY/COUNTY NAME)?

PROBE: Limitations in local capacity?

Strained relationships with other levels of government?

Difficulties involving the private sector?

Difficulty working with other levels of government?

Inadequate technical training?

Bureaucratic requirements?

Difficulty getting FEMA money in a timely manner?

14. How can the integration process, across your community, be enhanced; that is, how can the PI message be expanded to all segments of the community in a meaningful way?



15. Other than what we have already discussed, are there any resources that would help you meet your PI goals in the coming years? (PROBE: not money).

16. Many of the PI materials FEMA has made available to participating communities refer to the need to “leverage” PI funding for projects. What specifically does this term mean to you? And how has your community tried to leverage its FEMA funding for PI (PROBE: How successful?)

17. The seven PI pilot communities are getting project money at different times and in different amounts. Could you tell me how much “real” money (CITY/COUNTY NAME) has been received to date and how much of it has currently been spent?

18. Communities have had different experiences with PI-- some good, some less good. On a scale from 1 to 10 how far do you think your community has come to think of PI as a good tool for mitigation? (1 = "NOT GOOD AT ALL"; 10 = "VERY GOOD") (PROBE: And why do you say that?)

19. One of the goals of PI was to make disaster resistance part of local culture. On a scale from 1 TO 10 (1= "VERY LITTLE", 10 = "A GREAT DEAL"), how much do you think your community has thoroughly adopted the concept of disaster resistance in terms of planning, development and mitigation? (PROBE: AND WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?)

20. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = "VERY LITTLE", 10 = "A GREAT DEAL"), what is the extent of your total community's involvement in PI activities? By this we mean, the entire community. (IF "5" OR LOWER, PROBE: WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?)

21. Is there anyone else in your community who you think we should speak with to get more information or different views on PI?

Thank you. That concludes my questions. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences with the Project Impact program?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Planned Activity Chart**

## PART 1

### MITIGATION ACTIONS FOR [NAME OF COMMUNITY] AT THE TIME OF BECOMING A PROJECT IMPACT COMMUNITY:

The last time we interviewed in your community, these activities were some of the actions your community was already taking to become more disaster resistant.

A. Please indicate whether you have continued with this activity or not.

B. Please check if you have used other sources of funding, or funding from FEMA for this activity. (It is possible that you are using both sources for this activity. If so, check both.)

C. How central do you think this activity is to your community's concept of what Project Impact means?

IMPROVEMENTS OR CHANGES TO...	A. CONTINUED WITH THIS ACTIVITY			B. FUNDING SOURCE			C. HOW CENTRAL IS THIS ACTIVITY TO YOUR COMMUNITY'S CONCEPT OF BECOMING DISASTER RESISTANT? (CIRCLE ONE)					
	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	OTHER	PI	DON'T KNOW	NOT AT ALL	A LITTLE	SOME WHAT	A LOT	VERY	DON'T KNOW
1. CRS Rating							1	2	3	4	5	8
2. Maps of at-risk areas for specific hazards							1	2	3	4	5	8
3. Land use ordinances for flood-prone areas							1	2	3	4	5	8
4. Changes to Building Codes							1	2	3	4	5	8
5. Wind Codes							1	2	3	4	5	8
6. Building and zoning inspections							1	2	3	4	5	8

IMPROVEMENTS OR CHANGES TO...	A. CONTINUED WITH THIS ACTIVITY			B. FUNDING SOURCE			C. HOW CENTRAL IS THIS ACTIVITY TO YOUR COMMUNITY'S CONCEPT OF BECOMING DISASTER RESISTANT? (CIRCLE ONE)					
	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	OTHER	PI	DON'T KNOW	NOT AT ALL	A LITTLE	SOME WHAT	A LOT	VERY	DON'T KNOW
7. "Blue Sky" mitigation project							1	2	3	4	5	8
8. Land-use mapping							1	2	3	4	5	8
9. Risk assessment							1	2	3	4	5	8
10. Sweeney Water Plant Renovation							1	2	3	4	5	8
11. Radio communication network							1	2	3	4	5	8
12. Safety check by General Electric							1	2	3	4	5	8

## **Part 4**

### **Project Impact Partners in [NAME OF COMMUNITY]**

The following is a list of partners identified when we were in your community last year.

**B. On a scale from 1 to 5 please circle how active these partners have been in helping you become disaster resistant during the past year.**

**C. Please list any new partners you may have recruited since we last spoke and assign an activity rating to their participation.**

#### **A. Early Partners:**

##### **Federal Participants**

	NOT AT ALL ACTIVE	A LITTLE ACTIVE	MODERATELY ACTIVE	QUITE ACTIVE	VERY ACTIVE	NOT A PARTNER	DON'T KNOW
U.S. Department of Transportation	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Federal Emergency Management Agency	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	1	2	3	4	5	8	9

##### **County Participants**

_____ County Department of Engineering and Building Inspections	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
_____ County Board of Commissions	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
_____ County Department of Emergency Management	1	2	3	4	5	8	9

##### **Private Sector and Other Community- Based**

	NOT AT ALL ACTIVE	A LITTLE ACTIVE	MODERATELY ACTIVE	QUITE ACTIVE	VERY ACTIVE	NOT A PARTNER	DON'T KNOW
General Electric	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
WGNI-FM Radio	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Motorola Communications and Electronics, Inc.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Coastal Electronics	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Carolina Power and Lights	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
North Carolina State Port Authority	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Occidental Chemical Corporation	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Hoechst Gelanese	1	2	3	4	5	8	9



## PART 2

### POSSIBLE MITIGATION ACTIVITIES NOT STARTED IN YEAR 1 FOR [NAME OF COMMUNITY]:

In addition to the things that you are already doing:

- A. Please tell me whether you have recently begun any of these activities. Have you rejected the following project, are planning the project, the project is ready for implementation, the project is in progress, or is the project finished?
- B. Please check if you have used other sources of funding or funding from FEMA for this activity. (It is possible that you are using both sources for this activity. If so, check both.)
- C. How central you feel this activity is to the concept of PI in your community?

PROJECT	A. STATUS OF PROJECT				B. FUNDING SOURCE			C. HOW CENTRAL IS THIS ACTIVITY TO YOUR COMMUNITY'S CONCEPT OF BECOMING DISASTER RESISTANT? (CIRCLE ONE)						
	CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED	READY FOR IMPLEMENTATION	IN PROGRESS	FINISHED	DON'T KNOW	OTHER	PI	DON'T KNOW	NOT AT ALL	A LITTLE	SOME WHAT	A LOT	VERY	DON'T KNOW
Inventory of hazardous buildings									1	2	3	4	5	8

# PART 3

## STATUS OF PROJECT IMPACT ACTIVITIES FOR [NAME OF COMMUNITY]

- A. Please check the box that best describes the status of each Project Impact activity (you may check more than one for each activity).  
 B. Please identify the person and the department or organization that has the main responsibility for the activity.

ACTIVITIES	A. STATUS				B. ORGANIZATION AND PERSON WITH MAIN RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTIVITY
	DECIDED NOT TO PURSUE	BEGUN OR ONGOING	COMPLETED	PLANNED FOR FUTURE	
1. Select schools for retrofit projects:					
a. Acquire consulting engineer					
b. Meet with FEMA/Locals & Engineers					
c. Refine scope of work and conduct site visits					
d. Develop phased approach to project based on field analysis and recommendations					
e. Refine construction activity and develop continuation schedule for FEMA review					
2. Identify an administrator/planner for Project Impact					
3. Formalize the steering committee					
4. Meet with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Coastal Services Center on results of the Community wide vulnerability/risk assessment					
5. Organize/initiate an all-hazard education and outreach program					
6. "Spring Break" activities of Corporation for National Service (Americorps)					
7. Safety weekend by Occidental Chemical					

# **DISASTER RESISTANT COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE: EVALUATION OF THE PILOT PHASE**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

PROJECT # SAI 97-09-18-04

Prepared for the  
Federal Emergency Management Agency

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August 24, 1998

## **ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT IMPACT: YEAR 1**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1995, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) unveiled a new national effort to encourage state and local adoption of mitigation policies and programs in an attempt to reduce escalating disaster relief and recovery costs (FEMA 1995). In 1996, Director James Lee Witt, acknowledging that “all mitigation is local,” convened a set of roundtable discussions, which included constituents from outside the traditional emergency management profession, to consider different approaches to local level adoption of mitigation programs.

Out of these discussions came a new program, originally called the Disaster Resistant Community Initiative, now known as Project Impact. The overall goal of Project Impact is “to bring communities together to take actions that prepare for—and protect themselves against—natural disasters in a collaborative effort” (FEMA 1997). Unlike other FEMA grant programs, the mitigation activities and strategies were to be developed by the communities themselves to meet local needs and to reflect local social and political cultures. This was expected to be a “bottom up” approach to mitigation. Guidance to the communities in how to meet this goal was provided in four objectives: to build community partnerships; to identify hazards and community vulnerability; to prioritize risk reduction actions; and to develop communication strategies to educate the public about Project Impact.

Project Impact was launched in the summer of 1997 with the identification of seven pilot communities that would receive “seed money” over a five-year period to implement new local programs and policies to improve their resistance to future disasters. Those communities were: New Hanover County/Wilmington, North Carolina; Deerfield Beach/Broward County, Florida; Pascagoula/ Jackson County, Mississippi; Oakland, California; Seattle/King County, Washington; Allegany County, Maryland; and Tucker and Randolph Counties, West Virginia.

In Fall, 1997, the Disaster Research Center began two-year assessment of these pilot communities’ efforts to meet the program’s four objectives. Year 1 of this assessment focuses on three issues: (1) identifying the local context within which Project Impact objectives are being approached, that is, providing a social, political, and disaster profile of each community; (2)

documenting the processes within each community related to initiating Project Impact, including intergovernmental relationships; and (3) the initial steps being taken to meet each of Project Impact's four objectives. Due to the wide variation in initiating Project Impact across the seven communities (in terms of the timing of initial contacts inviting the community to participate, signing a memorandum of agreement, and receiving funding), no attempt was made to evaluate outcomes in Year 1.

This Executive Summary focuses on the initial actions of the communities in meeting Project Impact's four objectives. Chapter 1 of this report reviews the history of Project Impact; Chapter 2 provides a description of the methodological approaches used in conducting this assessment. A profile of the communities and a description of their initial introduction to Project Impact are provided in Chapter 3 of the report.

### OBJECTIVE 1: BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

**In all communities, there was an a definite understanding that the development of partnerships—with the private sector, other governmental entities, and non-profits—is at the core of the Project Impact (PI) philosophy.**

The ways in which local governments sought to incorporate the private sector varied considerably. Some made use of existing business associations or local government committees that included businesses to pull the private sector into PI activities. Others invited high visibility corporations and enterprises to be on task forces or steering committees. In a few cases, local businesses actually took a major role in public outreach activities, donating expertise in mitigation planning (e.g., in conducting loss estimations for the local area), developing self-help programs for community residents (e.g., how to structurally reinforce their own homes), developing low-interest loan programs to help residents reinforce their homes, and providing funding to print public educational materials.

However, our research found a lack of in-depth, consistent involvement by the private sector across almost all of the communities at this early phase. It should be recognized that the private sector is not used to being involved with local jurisdictions in establishing or running governmental programs. In fact, local jurisdictions often must overcome a great deal of hesitancy or resistance before the private sector understands the nature of PI and what role they can play in this effort.

Several problems were identified that PI communities have to resolve before this objective can be fully realized:

1. The private sector does not understand what is expected of them in efforts to mitigate community risks and vulnerability. While some of the larger corporations do understand disaster preparedness and emergency response—and have made great

strides in these areas—they often do not think beyond their own property boundaries. Smaller companies often haven't even taken these steps for their own employees and facilities.

2. Because the availability of funding was often delayed for extended periods of time following the signing of the Memoranda of Agreement in several of the communities, momentum was lost and the private sector's interest also dwindled. Without active local coordinators or Steering/Planning Committees with available funding to put programs into place, early enthusiasm waned.
3. While one of the strengths in some communities was the existence of local government ties to the private sector, this often resulted in "tapping" the same people to participate in PI activities who were already contributing to the community in other ways. This had two consequences: it limited the development of broader inclusion of the private sector in PI activities; and it raised questions about which activities the corporations should pursue on behalf of the community. Frequently, companies opted for continuing the programs they were already committed to rather than beginning new projects (especially since there were no available models for private sector participation).

## **OBJECTIVE 2: IDENTIFICATION OF HAZARDS AND COMMUNITY VULNERABILITY**

**In almost all of the communities, hazard identification efforts are already underway, primarily for the most serious threat to the community.**

Hazard identification is clearly an activity that communities believe is fundamental to their ability to reduce their exposure to costly future disaster events. In some cases, these efforts had begun before the initiation of PI; but additional funding has allowed those communities to expand their efforts or to broaden the hazard characterization process. In general, these are not global hazard or vulnerability assessments, but rather focus on a particular threat (such as an earthquake, flood, or landslide), on a specific system (e.g., highways) or on a category of structures (e.g., schools), depending on the priorities established by the individual communities.

In almost all cases of hazard identification activities, communities are making use of partnerships to conduct or expand these efforts. Working agreements have been or are being developed with: the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Geological Survey, NOAA's Coastal Services Center, Americorps, universities, and private sector companies, to name a few active partners.

While hazard identification efforts are proceeding well, vulnerability assessments are not. It is clearly early in the process, however, to expect these assessments to be underway since they need to be based on the findings of the hazard analyses. We should anticipate seeing vulnerability

assessments initiated in Year 2; but this may be dependent on communities getting more guidance on how to conduct vulnerability assessments that will yield information on which to establish mitigation priorities.

Three problems were identified across the communities with respect to initiating hazard and vulnerability assessments:

1. Because of the delays associated with the negotiation and processing of the Statements of Work for Year 1, several of the communities could not begin their planned activities until late in the 1998 fiscal year. Although some of the pilot communities did have other “pots” of available funds they could draw on initially, the provision of funding closer to the signing of the memoranda of agreement (MOAs) would have definitely led to even greater strides in hazards identification/characterization activities in Year 1.
2. One major problem that must be resolved is the availability of a standardized geographic information system (GIS) and methodology for the display and analysis of hazard and vulnerability data. Currently, all of the communities are wrestling with the problem of how to integrate different databases (topographical maps, hazard maps, infrastructural maps, zoning maps, building data, and census information, to name a few) to use in developing their vulnerability assessments and establishing mitigation priorities. Although this problem goes beyond merely PI concerns, some leadership and technical advice in this area is needed in order to facilitate the move from Objective 2 to Objective 3.
3. While several of the MOAs mention the use of HAZUS as a hazard identification and vulnerability assessment tool that is expected to be used, none of the communities—at this point—have either the expertise to use the program, see a need for the program (since only an earthquake HAZUS program exists), or have rejected the tool in favor of other loss estimation techniques. Unless additional technical assistance is going to be provided to the communities on the use of HAZUS—for earthquakes as well as for other natural hazard agents—it is unlikely that this tool will be used.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PRIORITIZING RISK REDUCTION ACTIONS

**Although it is early for substantial mitigation efforts to be implemented, some focused mitigation projects did begin in Year 1 that are due specifically to PI funding: the non-structural seismic retrofitting of all facilities in one school district; the elevation of a home as a demonstration project in a flood area; the retrofit of a school in a coastal area to sustain hurricane-force winds.**

The most frequent types of mitigation-associated activities undertaken by the communities during Year 1 are the initiation or intensification of efforts to develop long-term, community-wide mitigation plans and to outline new building code and land use regulations that will reduce future disaster impacts and losses. These planning activities are crucial for future mitigation efforts to materialize; however

In general, these mitigation projects had been identified by the communities prior to the initiation of PI but had only been initiated when the opportunity of additional funding became available. These are direct reflections of the types of efforts PI was supposed to foster—the use of seed money to implement mitigation projects, often with the involvement of a cross-section of stakeholders from the community. These efforts began in the communities that received their PI funding early in the fiscal year or that had funds available from other sources (e.g., the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program) until PI funds became accessible. We find these early mitigation efforts very encouraging and would expect to see more activities in subsequent years.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

**By far, the majority of PI activities to date, across the pilot communities, have focused on the development of public education materials on PI, its projects, and do-it-yourself mitigation programs for residential retrofitting.**

This emphasis on public communication is necessary in order to develop widespread community understanding of the principals of PI, to explain the concept of mitigation to a public that is more familiar with disaster preparedness, to recruit partners for the communities' activities, and to promote participation in local mitigation programs.

In many ways, the activities undertaken for this objective built on the programs that communities were already familiar with—preparedness planning programs for the public—and were often tied to those earlier efforts as an extension. Partners who had previously worked with the local community—businesses, the Red Cross, churches and universities—were used to expand on these earlier efforts and to provide mechanisms for the dissemination of PI information. Similarly, some of the communities had developed working relationships with various media outlets due to previous disaster events and preparedness programs—on radio and television, and in newspapers—through which they also disseminated information on PI.

Developing and providing educational materials was discovered to be an excellent role for the private sector—it was familiar and unambiguous. Local businesses could appreciate the need to provide information to the public about loss prevention (although they frequently understood this to mean “preparedness” rather than “mitigation”). As a consequence, the private sector and non-profit organizations actively participated in the development of, and provision of resources for: educational videos, information pamphlets, materials on how to retrofit residential structures, display booths at local fairs; and additional disaster-related training for their employees.



One problem was identified with respect to this objective: what is the efficacy of these efforts? Concern was voiced in multiple communities concerning the “public relations” aspect of PI as opposed to its instrumental value in actually heightening the level of awareness of and commitment to undertake mitigation measures. This concern was expressed primarily about the media attention focused on the signing ceremony, where local stakeholders felt that the message about mitigation might have gotten lost in the “glare of the spotlight.” It is perhaps too early to try to assess whether these efforts have, in fact, resulted in educating the public about the importance of mitigation. However, if the purpose of PI is to change the culture in the United States concerning the need to reduce disaster losses through mitigation programs, a true public education effort focused on changing not only public awareness and knowledge, but providing motivation for changing behavior is required. Public relations efforts aimed only at popularizing the PI name and some activities won’t accomplish this change. Guidance should be provided to these communities in how to develop change-oriented, public educational campaigns that will yield future mitigation actions rather than merely dispositions toward the PI program.

### GLOBAL ISSUES

In addition to these findings on progress toward meeting PI objectives, four factors related to the PI process, to organizational structure, or to local political climate were identified that produced some impediments for the local communities in their attempts to respond to PI in the most constructive fashion.

1. **Local Perceptions of Competence and Understanding**—In the initial interactions with the local communities, there was a perception by some of the community residents that FEMA representatives did not believe that the locals had an understanding of mitigation or the underlying need for risk and vulnerability assessments, even though many of them had gone through recent disasters, had developed comprehensive mitigation plans, and had participated in the Hazard Mitigation Grant program. On the other hand, FEMA representatives believed that they had to change local community and emergency management culture that almost exclusively dealt with issues of disaster preparedness and response, and that had little experience with disaster-prevention programs that involved more than just the emergency management department. While there is some truth to both perspectives, the lack of a discourse between these two levels of government to discuss the focus and principals of PI over a sustained period of time led to frustration on the part of FEMA employees and anger on the part of local stakeholders.
2. **Distrust of Federal Initiatives**—Historically, federal (and sometimes state) initiatives and programs have often met with skepticism or hostility by local communities, believing that “big government” was trying to intrude into the ways local governments were dealing with political, economic, and social issues. In recent

years, the “devolution” of federal programs to local governments was seen as both a way of addressing this perceived imposition, but which also carried with it an unexpectedly high price tag for this autonomy. In several of the pilot communities, past experiences with federal programs, including some of FEMA’s, predisposed local government representatives as well as the private sector to be wary of the offer of a “no strings attached” program that encouraged communities to develop their own priorities and programs to reduce their disaster vulnerability. This was an especially difficult issue for FEMA representatives—at both the national and regional levels—to diffuse since they had had no previous experience dealing directly with local communities and their constituents. Although FEMA representatives engaged in “good faith” efforts to explain the program and how it would work, a great deal of skepticism still has to be overcome in some of the local communities before smoothly functioning working relationships can be developed between the regional offices and the local communities.

3. **The Context of Intergovernmental Relationships**—Project Impact is a unique, highly innovative program that was being presented, negotiated, and confirmed (through the development of the MOAs) within a set of intergovernmental relationships, some new and others pre-existing. Because of the inexperience of FEMA representatives with local governments (their previous programmatic relationships had been solely with states), an appreciation for the subtle ways in which cities and their counties interacted was often missing. The identification of a city or a county as a “lead” community often had unanticipated, subsequent consequences for the development of PI, in that some jurisdictions refused to participate or were not allowed to by the other local jurisdiction. In some cases, when states were not involved in the process of selecting a PI community (a situation that may now be resolved), they did not actively become involved with supporting the local community’s programs. A sensitivity to these sub-national governmental histories and relationships must be incorporated into future PI administrative actions; the “forcing” of a new program onto these old patterns of governmental relationships will not provide the types of supportive partnerships needed by local governments in their coalition-building efforts.
  
4. **Changing an Organizational Culture**—In a foresightful way, FEMA recognized the need to change the organizational cultures of local communities and their emergency management agencies if losses from future disasters were to be avoided. Project Impact was the vehicle FEMA identified to provide the motivation to make this change. Yet, FEMA—as an organization itself—must also be prepared to change its organizational culture. Certainly, over the past three years or so, the Agency has structurally re-organized itself in order to focus a considerable amount of its resources and personnel on mitigation, especially at the national headquarters. From this analysis, however, two additional changes are needed in order to provide additional support for local-level mitigation to succeed.

First, additional technical expertise must be made available to the PI communities to assist them in undertaking hazard and vulnerability assessments, and in assisting them with regulatory revisions. While “partners” can be called upon to assist in these efforts, it must be recognized that these are volunteers who are donating their time and talents for the benefit of their communities, but who also have other requirements on their time. Technical expertise, especially in the regional offices, would contribute to the sustained efforts of communities to move toward Objective 3. Second, FEMA could become more pro-active in identifying federal resources or partners to assist communities in their various activities. This requires more than identifying liaisons to various federal agencies; it requires the delegation of responsibility for actually matching local needs with federal programs to enhance the ability of communities to realize their objectives.

In summary, we believe that Project Impact can be successful over the coming years, especially if lessons from the pilot phase are taken into account. The local communities are enthusiastic about this new program, although they need to be given the access to the tools and expertise—not just funding—that will allow them to fulfill Project Impact’s goal of becoming disaster resistant communities.



# **DISASTER RESISTANT COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE: EVALUATION OF THE PILOT PHASE**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**PROJECT # SAI 97-09-18-04**

**Prepared for the  
Federal Emergency Management Agency**

**Prepared by  
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**August 24, 1998**

## **ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT IMPACT: YEAR 1**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1995, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) unveiled a new national effort to encourage state and local adoption of mitigation policies and programs in an attempt to reduce escalating disaster relief and recovery costs (FEMA 1995). In 1996, Director James Lee Witt, acknowledging that "all mitigation is local," convened a set of roundtable discussions, which included constituents from outside the traditional emergency management profession, to consider different approaches to local level adoption of mitigation programs.

Out of these discussions came a new program, originally called the Disaster Resistant Community Initiative, now known as Project Impact. The overall goal of Project Impact is "to bring communities together to take actions that prepare for—and protect themselves against—natural disasters in a collaborative effort" (FEMA 1997). Unlike other FEMA grant programs, the mitigation activities and strategies were to be developed by the communities themselves to meet local needs and to reflect local social and political cultures. This was expected to be a "bottom up" approach to mitigation. Guidance to the communities in how to meet this goal was provided in four objectives: to build community partnerships; to identify hazards and community vulnerability; to prioritize risk reduction actions; and to develop communication strategies to educate the public about Project Impact.

Project Impact was launched in the summer of 1997 with the identification of seven pilot communities that would receive "seed money" over a five-year period to implement new local programs and policies to improve their resistance to future disasters. Those communities were: New Hanover County/Wilmington, North Carolina; Deerfield Beach/Broward County, Florida; Pascagoula/ Jackson County, Mississippi; Oakland, California; Seattle/King County, Washington; Allegany County, Maryland; and Tucker and Randolph Counties, West Virginia.

In Fall, 1997, the Disaster Research Center began two-year assessment of these pilot communities' efforts to meet the program's four objectives. Year 1 of this assessment focuses on three issues: (1) identifying the local context within which Project Impact objectives are being approached, that is, providing a social, political, and disaster profile of each community; (2)

documenting the processes within each community related to initiating Project Impact, including intergovernmental relationships; and (3) the initial steps being taken to meet each of Project Impact's four objectives. Due to the wide variation in initiating Project Impact across the seven communities (in terms of the timing of initial contacts inviting the community to participate, signing a memorandum of agreement, and receiving funding), no attempt was made to evaluate outcomes in Year 1.

This Executive Summary focuses on the initial actions of the communities in meeting Project Impact's four objectives. Chapter 1 of this report reviews the history of Project Impact; Chapter 2 provides a description of the methodological approaches used in conducting this assessment. A profile of the communities and a description of their initial introduction to Project Impact are provided in Chapter 3 of the report.

### **OBJECTIVE 1: BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

**In all communities, there was an a definite understanding that the development of partnerships—with the private sector, other governmental entities, and non-profits—is at the core of the Project Impact (PI) philosophy.**

The ways in which local governments sought to incorporate the private sector varied considerably. Some made use of existing business associations or local government committees that included businesses to pull the private sector into PI activities. Others invited high visibility corporations and enterprises to be on task forces or steering committees. In a few cases, local businesses actually took a major role in public outreach activities, donating expertise in mitigation planning (e.g., in conducting loss estimations for the local area), developing self-help programs for community residents (e.g., how to structurally reinforce their own homes), developing low-interest loan programs to help residents reinforce their homes, and providing funding to print public educational materials.

However, our research found a lack of in-depth, consistent involvement by the private sector across almost all of the communities at this early phase. It should be recognized that the private sector is not used to being involved with local jurisdictions in establishing or running governmental programs. In fact, local jurisdictions often must overcome a great deal of hesitancy or resistance before the private sector understands the nature of PI and what role they can play in this effort.

Several problems were identified that PI communities have to resolve before this objective can be fully realized:

1. The private sector does not understand what is expected of them in efforts to mitigate community risks and vulnerability. While some of the larger corporations do understand disaster preparedness and emergency response—and have made great

strides in these areas—they often do not think beyond their own property boundaries. Smaller companies often haven't even taken these steps for their own employees and facilities.

2. Because the availability of funding was often delayed for extended periods of time following the signing of the Memoranda of Agreement in several of the communities, momentum was lost and the private sector's interest also dwindled. Without active local coordinators or Steering/Planning Committees with available funding to put programs into place, early enthusiasm waned.
3. While one of the strengths in some communities was the existence of local government ties to the private sector, this often resulted in "tapping" the same people to participate in PI activities who were already contributing to the community in other ways. This had two consequences: it limited the development of broader inclusion of the private sector in PI activities; and it raised questions about which activities the corporations should pursue on behalf of the community. Frequently, companies opted for continuing the programs they were already committed to rather than beginning new projects (especially since there were no available models for private sector participation).

## **OBJECTIVE 2: IDENTIFICATION OF HAZARDS AND COMMUNITY VULNERABILITY**

**In almost all of the communities, hazard identification efforts are already underway, primarily for the most serious threat to the community.**

Hazard identification is clearly an activity that communities believe is fundamental to their ability to reduce their exposure to costly future disaster events. In some cases, these efforts had begun before the initiation of PI; but additional funding has allowed those communities to expand their efforts or to broaden the hazard characterization process. In general, these are not global hazard or vulnerability assessments, but rather focus on a particular threat (such as an earthquake, flood, or landslide), on a specific system (e.g., highways) or on a category of structures (e.g., schools), depending on the priorities established by the individual communities.

In almost all cases of hazard identification activities, communities are making use of partnerships to conduct or expand these efforts. Working agreements have been or are being developed with: the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Geological Survey, NOAA's Coastal Services Center, Americorps, universities, and private sector companies, to name a few active partners.

While hazard identification efforts are proceeding well, vulnerability assessments are not. It is clearly early in the process, however, to expect these assessments to be underway since they need to be based on the findings of the hazard analyses. We should anticipate seeing vulnerability



assessments initiated in Year 2; but this may be dependent on communities getting more guidance on how to conduct vulnerability assessments that will yield information on which to establish mitigation priorities.

Three problems were identified across the communities with respect to initiating hazard and vulnerability assessments:

1. Because of the delays associated with the negotiation and processing of the Statements of Work for Year 1, several of the communities could not begin their planned activities until late in the 1998 fiscal year. Although some of the pilot communities did have other “pots” of available funds they could draw on initially, the provision of funding closer to the signing of the memoranda of agreement (MOAs) would have definitely led to even greater strides in hazards identification/characterization activities in Year 1.
2. One major problem that must be resolved is the availability of a standardized geographic information system (GIS) and methodology for the display and analysis of hazard and vulnerability data. Currently, all of the communities are wrestling with the problem of how to integrate different databases (topographical maps, hazard maps, infrastructural maps, zoning maps, building data, and census information, to name a few) to use in developing their vulnerability assessments and establishing mitigation priorities. Although this problem goes beyond merely PI concerns, some leadership and technical advice in this area is needed in order to facilitate the move from Objective 2 to Objective 3.
3. While several of the MOAs mention the use of HAZUS as a hazard identification and vulnerability assessment tool that is expected to be used, none of the communities—at this point—have either the expertise to use the program, see a need for the program (since only an earthquake HAZUS program exists), or have rejected the tool in favor of other loss estimation techniques. Unless additional technical assistance is going to be provided to the communities on the use of HAZUS—for earthquakes as well as for other natural hazard agents—it is unlikely that this tool will be used.

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**Although it is early for substantial mitigation efforts to be implemented, some focused mitigation projects did begin in Year 1 that are due specifically to PI funding: the non-structural seismic retrofitting of all facilities in one school district; the elevation of a home as a demonstration project in a flood area; the retrofit of a school in a coastal area to sustain hurricane-force winds.**

The most frequent types of mitigation-associated activities undertaken by the communities during Year 1 are the initiation or intensification of efforts to develop long-term, community-wide mitigation plans and to outline new building code and land use regulations that will reduce future disaster impacts and losses. These planning activities are crucial for future mitigation efforts to materialize; however

In general, these mitigation projects had been identified by the communities prior to the initiation of PI but had only been initiated when the opportunity of additional funding became available. These are direct reflections of the types of efforts PI was supposed to foster—the use of seed money to implement mitigation projects, often with the involvement of a cross-section of stakeholders from the community. These efforts began in the communities that received their PI funding early in the fiscal year or that had funds available from other sources (e.g., the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program) until PI funds became accessible. We find these early mitigation efforts very encouraging and would expect to see more activities in subsequent years.

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**By far, the majority of PI activities to date, across the pilot communities, have focused on the development of public education materials on PI, its projects, and do-it-yourself mitigation programs for residential retrofitting.**

This emphasis on public communication is necessary in order to develop widespread community understanding of the principals of PI, to explain the concept of mitigation to a public that is more familiar with disaster preparedness, to recruit partners for the communities' activities, and to promote participation in local mitigation programs.

In many ways, the activities undertaken for this objective built on the programs that communities were already familiar with—preparedness planning programs for the public—and were often tied to those earlier efforts as an extension. Partners who had previously worked with the local community—businesses, the Red Cross, churches and universities—were used to expand on these earlier efforts and to provide mechanisms for the dissemination of PI information. Similarly, some of the communities had developed working relationships with various media outlets due to previous disaster events and preparedness programs—on radio and television, and in newspapers—through which they also disseminated information on PI.

Developing and providing educational materials was discovered to be an excellent role for the private sector—it was familiar and unambiguous. Local businesses could appreciate the need to provide information to the public about loss prevention (although they frequently understood this to mean “preparedness” rather than “mitigation”). As a consequence, the private sector and non-profit organizations actively participated in the development of, and provision of resources for: educational videos, information pamphlets, materials on how to retrofit residential structures, display booths at local fairs; and additional disaster-related training for their employees.

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### GLOBAL ISSUES

In addition to these findings on progress toward meeting PI objectives, four factors related to the PI process, to organizational structure, or to local political climate were identified that produced some impediments for the local communities in their attempts to respond to PI in the most constructive fashion.

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University of Delaware  
Disaster Research Center

FINAL PROJECT REPORT  
#43

DISASTER RESISTANT COMMUNITIES  
INITIATIVE: FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

Tricia Wachtendorf  
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2000

**DISASTER RESISTANT COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE:  
FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS**

**PROJECT #EMW-97-CA-0519**

**Report to the  
Federal Emergency Management Agency**

**By Tricia Wachtendorf, Jasmin K. Riad, and Kathleen J. Tierney**

**Disaster Research Center  
University of Delaware**

**June, 2000**

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## INTRODUCTION

In fall 1997, the Disaster Research Center began a two-year study on the development and implementation of Project Impact in the seven communities that were chosen as pilot sites for the program: Allegany County, Maryland; Deerfield Beach, Florida; Oakland, California; Pascagoula, Mississippi; Seattle, Washington; Tucker County and Randolph County, West Virginia; and Wilmington, North Carolina. These seven communities were each given a million dollars to enhance their disaster resistance through mitigation projects, public education activities, and the development of public-private partnerships. Earlier DRC reports on the lessons learned by these communities during the first year in this new program were intended to provide the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with feedback on the types of challenges the communities faced, the processes they had established to manage Project Impact, the types of activities they had undertaken, and the benefits or opportunities they derived from participating in the program. In late 1997, FEMA brought another fifty communities into Project Impact.

As FEMA began plans to provide funding to fifty more communities in late 1998, several questions were raised concerning the applicability of the pilot communities' experiences for newer communities. For example, it was not clear whether experiences would be transferrable, since pilot communities had received substantially more funding and attention from FEMA's national and regional staffs than would any of the newer communities. In fact, regional offices often considered themselves understaffed to take on the responsibilities of providing guidance and technical assistance to communities in this newly-expanded program.

At the request of the Director of Project Impact, the Disaster Research Center conducted focus group interviews in December, 1998 (at the first Project Impact Summit) with knowledgeable representatives from the newer communities that had been added during the previous year. In December, 1999, focus group interviews were also conducted with representatives from communities that had been added to the program during the previous two years. These focus groups allowed for comparisons of changes across non-pilot communities to determine whether new issues had emerged, whether old issues had been resolved, whether understandings of the Project Impact philosophy had changed, and whether new creative program activities were being undertaken.

## METHODOLOGY

### Overview of the Focus Group Concept and Process

According to Krueger (1998; 1994), a focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perspectives on a defined area of interest in a non-threatening environment. The intent of the focus group is to provide a candid depiction of participants' views on a specific topic. The interviewer (or discussion moderator) does not try to bring the group to consensus, but rather encourages comments of all types, both positive and negative, on the topic under discussion. The focus group does not attempt to problem-solve. Rather, the purpose of the group is to encourage participants to express their ideas, feelings, and assessments of the topical areas being considered. Focus groups can be used for various purposes, including program evaluation. For example, when a new program or project has been initiated, focus groups can play a role in the formative evaluation process by eliciting participants' views on program goals and strategies. The current study is an example of that evaluative approach.

The focus group is thought to be an especially useful method of data collection under the following circumstances (Krueger & Morgan 1993):

1. When there is a gap in communication or understanding among groups or categories of people, and especially when there is a power differential between participants and decision makers.
2. When the purpose of the investigation is to uncover factors relating to complex behaviors or motivations.
3. When the goal of the investigation is to gain reactions to program areas that need improvement or general guidelines on how a programmatic change might be made.

A focus group typically is composed of strangers or of people who have minimal contact with one another in their daily lives. However, focus groups are best conducted with participants who are similar along dimensions that are considered relevant to the topic of interest, and this homogeneity is stressed at the beginning of the group discussion. Even subtle status differences among participants can result in hesitation to share ideas or opinions.

Multiple focus group interviews are generally conducted around particular topics because multiple groups with similar participants are needed to detect patterns and trends across groups. As a rule of thumb, a minimum of three focus groups is recommended in order to obtain broad coverage of topical areas. However, if focus groups are intended to assist decision makers with choices that could have major implications for a program, more group sessions are warranted.

Groups are typically composed of six to ten participants: a group must be large enough to provide for a diversity of perceptions, but small enough for everyone to have an opportunity to speak. For the group to be successful, selection criteria for participants must be specific, identifying the characteristics of the population group members are expected to represent.

### **Purpose of the Project Impact Focus Group Study**

The objectives of the focus group interviews conducted for this study were to provide suggestions for future changes to the Project Impact (PI) program, obtain preliminary feedback regarding the development of PI in the non-pilot communities, and gauge the extent to which the initiative is gaining momentum. The focus groups constitute one component of a larger evaluation of Project Impact conducted by the Disaster Research Center. This larger evaluation involved interviews, site visits, and analysis of documentary materials in the seven pilot communities. For more information on these studies and a detailed analysis of the pilot community evaluations, see Nigg, et al., (1998) and Disaster Research Center (2000a; 2000b).

### **Data Collection Strategy**

Participant Selection in Year One. On December 8, 1998 the Disaster Research Center (DRC) conducted three focus groups with representatives of Project Impact communities who were attending the Project Impact Summit in Washington, D.C. From a list of Summit participants made available to DRC by FEMA national staff, focus group participants were selected using a stratified sampling procedure. The respondents were stratified on the following dimensions: their functional position in the community; the length of time their community had been involved in Project Impact; the FEMA regional location of their community; and whether their communities were urban or rural.

Prospective focus group members were then sent a letter of invitation by Maria Vorel, Project Impact National Director, explaining the purpose of the focus groups. The official FEMA request was followed by a phone call from DRC staff. When the respondent agreed to be part of the focus groups, DRC staff sent a letter of confirmation (see Appendix A) and a copy of the questions that would be discussed during the focus group (see Appendix B). After several rounds of substitutions (due to the unavailability of possible participants at the time the focus group interviews had been scheduled), three focus groups with a total of fifteen representatives were convened. These participants represented eleven cities and three counties. An additional thirty-five representatives were asked to participate but could not change their travel reservations or were unable to attend the summit.

Participants in Year One. The first focus group consisted of two emergency managers, two building officials, an assistant director of public works, and a chief storm water engineer. The second focus group was composed of a city manager, a deputy emergency manager, a city/county building commissioner, and a community affairs manager/Project Impact coordinator. The third focus group consisted of a non-profit representative, a city administrator, an environmental planner, an assistant director of engineering and building standards, and a contingency manager of a large private industry.

These participants were spread across nine of the ten FEMA regions and were evenly split between urban and rural communities (seven and eight, respectively). Nine of the respondents were from communities that had already signed Memoranda of Agreement, while six were from communities that were in the process of being introduced to Project Impact goals and activities.

Participant Selection in Year Two. On December 12, 1999 the Disaster Research Center conducted a second series of focus group interviews with representatives of Project Impact communities who were attending the Project Impact Summit in Washington, D.C. From a list of summit registrants made available to DRC by FEMA Summit organizers, focus group participants were again selected using a stratified sampling procedure. The invited respondents were stratified using the same criteria as in Year One: their functional position in the community; the length of time their community had been involved in Project Impact; the FEMA regional location of their community; and whether their communities were urban or rural.

The selected representatives were then faxed letters of invitation by DRC, explaining the purpose of the focus groups. The official request was followed up by a phone call from a DRC staff member. When a respondent agreed to be part of a focus group, DRC staff faxed a letter of confirmation (see Appendix C), along with a copy of the questions that would be discussed during the focus group interview (see Appendix D). Four groups with a total of thirty representatives were convened. An additional four representatives who were asked to participate did not come to the group session. The participants represented seventeen cities, seven counties, five regional areas (that is, more than one county), and three partner organizations.

Participants in Year Two. The first focus group consisted of one emergency manager, one PI coordinator, one building official, a director of public works, a planner, a representative of a non-profit agency, and a university administrator involved in Project Impact. The second focus group consisted of an assistant city manager, an emergency management director, a county commissioner, an administrative assistant to a PI coordinator, a PI coordinator, a county building official, a public works director, and two business representatives. The third group was made up of a county manager, an emergency management director, a county commissioner, a PI coordinator, a planner, a county building official, a superintendent of a school system, a public works planner, and a representative of the business community. The fourth group was comprised of two PI coordinators, an assistant city manager, a non-profit representative, and a business representative.

All ten FEMA regions were represented, and participants were evenly split between urban and rural communities. Twenty-one of the respondents were from communities that had already signed Memoranda of Agreement, while nine either had not yet signed an MOA, did not know whether or not such a document had been signed, or were unaware of the status of the MOA at the time the discussions were held.

**Data Collection.** In preparation for the focus group discussions, members of the DRC team were trained in data collection procedures, including: keeping records of any observations of participants' behavior (e.g., body language, subject interaction), making note of prominent themes, and keeping track of noteworthy statements made by group members. When the focus groups were convened at the summit, each group had a moderator and an assistant moderator. The largest focus group had two additional assistants. Prior to the initiation of the group discussion, all group participants were briefed on DRC's confidentiality policies, and all were asked to sign consent forms. Participants were reassured that no statements made in the group would be attributed to them, and they were also asked to keep the comments made by other group members confidential. The focus group discussions were taped and later transcribed.

During the focus groups, the moderator kept the discussion on track and made sure that everyone was comfortable with the flow of communication. The assistant moderator greeted and integrated late arrivals into the on-going group, monitored the ten minute time allotment for each question, took notes, and generally observed participants' behavior for any indication of uneasiness (of which there were none).

### **Analysis of Focus Group Interviews and Identification of Themes**

The remainder of this report analyzes and summarizes participants' responses to the specific questions posed during the focus group discussions. Group members' comments were collapsed into categories in order to provide an overview of the general themes that emerged. When possible, comparisons were made between 1998 and 1999 focus groups. The major issues discussed in this report include the following:

- the degree of involvement group participants have with local Project Impact programs;
- community goals and objectives;
- sustaining momentum;
- expansion of the Project Impact initiative to all segments of the community;
- issues related to partnerships;
- the Project Impact start-up process;
- problems and challenges; and
- issues involved in moving the program from an emphasis on education to active efforts to achieve mitigation goals

The report closes with a summary of participants' suggestions for what FEMA can do to help communities succeed, as well as the direction they believe PI should take in the coming years.

## PROJECT IMPACT INVOLVEMENT

In both 1998 and 1999, focus group participants were asked to rank on a scale from 1-10 (with 1 meaning 'very little' and 10 meaning 'a great deal') the extent of their personal and community involvement in Project Impact. Tables 1 and 2 list the scores given by respondents. In 1998, the average reported intensity of personal involvement was 7.75 (median 10), and average community involvement was 6.31 (median 5). In 1999, the average self-rating for personal involvement was 8.5 (median 9.5), and the average rating for community involvement was 6.1 (median 6.0). The most common responses in 1998 were 10 for personal involvement and 10 for community involvement. In 1999, the most common responses were 10 for personal involvement and 4 for community involvement. Personal involvement scores remained high in 1999, although community involvement scores decreased. Lower community involvement scores in 1999 may reflect a more realistic assessment on the part of communities regarding how far they still have to go in order to reach all segments of the community.

**Table 1: Project Impact Involvement 1998 Focus Groups**

Personal Involvement	Community Involvement	Position
10	10	City Emergency Manager
10	9	Assistant Director of Public Works and Operations
10	10	Superintendent of Buildings
3	2	Emergency Management Coordinator
8	10	City Building Official
6	5	Chief Storm-Water Engineer
10	5	City Manager
not stated	5	Deputy Emergency Manager
10	3	City/County Building Commissioner
5	3	Environmental Planner
Not Stated	7	Executive Director for Non-Profit
10	3	PI Coordinator
10	10	City Administrator
1	not stated	Assistant Director of Engineering and Building Standards
not stated	not stated	Contingency Manager

**Table 2: Project Impact Involvement 1999 Focus Groups**

Personal Involvement	Community Involvement	Position
10	7	Regional PI Coordinator
not stated	5	EMS Coordinator
10	10	Principal Planner
3	6	Building Inspector/ Code Enforcement
10	10	University Administrator
5	8	Public Work Director
not stated	3	Executive Director Non Profit
10	2	Project Impact Coordinator
8	6	County Commissioner
10	7	Assistant City Manager
5	8	Emergency Management Director
6	4	Administrative Assistant to the PI Coordinator
5	10	County Building Official
10	4	Business Representative
10	4	Public Works Director
10	2	Assistant Vice-President of Business
10	4	PI Coordinator
9	9	County Commissioner
not stated	not stated	County Manager
8	4	Emergency Management Director
not stated	10	Local Planner
9	7	PI Coordinator
8	3	Assistant Superintendent
10	7	Planner in Public Works
not stated	not stated	Business Representative
10	5	PI Coordinator
10	6	PI Coordinator
9	5	Assistant City Manager
not stated	not stated	Business Representative
9	9	Non Profit Representative

## COMMUNITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In both 1998 and 1999, one of the first questions the DRC facilitators asked focus group participants was to outline their communities' goals with respect to the Project Impact initiative. In both years, education and mitigation activities were most commonly mentioned, followed by partnership-building efforts. In 1998, participants were more likely to report planning initiatives—such as the development of mitigation plans and activity plans—as a primary community goal, while in 1999 the community representatives were more likely to report conducting or completing risk assessments as a future or accomplished objective. Overall, the communities intended to address multiple issues. That is, the goals of most communities did not fall solely under mitigation or solely under partnership-building, but instead included a variety of activities.

### Public Education and Information Dissemination

Education was a key goal for communities. Participants spoke broadly about general disaster education, but many also planned to target their educational projects on hazard identification, mitigation, and preparedness. Communities described a number of education strategies they wanted to adopt, including: the use of literature and videos; seminars; interactive CDs, mitigation training for small businesses; and other business programs. Education was seen as important to enhancing long-term community involvement in disaster mitigation. As one group participant stated:

“Once the grants run out and all the emphasis, the initial emphasis runs out, [we want to make this project] a way of life through an educational base within the community.”

Most representatives saw education of children as a vital component of a community's overall agenda. According to this group member:

“[These children] are going to be in the city councils. They're gonna be in the city and the state government, federal government. They're going to be making the decisions.”

Smaller communities often did not have the same degree of media access as larger cities, and, as a result, found it difficult to provide disaster and mitigation information to their residents. One of the goals reported by one participant was the establishment of a low wattage radio station:

“[We want to] establish our own local, government-run radio station that communicates information to the public in times of emergency, but also [serves] as an educational medium. This is for people from somewhat rural areas and this may be different for people from urban areas.”

In the 1999 groups, participants stressed the importance of targeting their educational approaches to the audiences they were addressing. For example, educating businesses about mitigation may call for a very different approach than educating home owners. Participants noted that it is important to have many small outreach meetings instead of attempting to attract 300 people to one big meeting. That way they can reach individuals in their own established groups, target the message to the audience, and connect more directly with the audience.

### Mitigation

The specifics of the activities reported by focus group participants are tied closely to the types of hazards their communities face. However, several discernable trends did emerge from their



discussions. In 1998 and 1999, participants considered structural projects, such as home elevation, home buyouts, and home retrofit, as important activities in their communities. They also stressed that adopting stronger building codes and better land use policies were vital steps toward disaster resistance. Participants were concerned about mitigation issues ranging from stormwater management to mitigation that improves business continuity. Their goals also included improving emergency notification systems, installing back-up generators, and addressing wildfire issues. Although the activities themselves varied between the first and second year focus groups, the overall types of mitigation strategies communities wanted to implement remained fairly consistent (see Table 3).

### **Enhancing Partnerships**

As expected, building community partnerships was a frequently-mentioned program objective. In 1998, respondents wanted to train and build relations with non-profit organizations, critical players in the emergency response sector, and businesses. Their partnership expectations included promoting mitigation within these organizations, leveraging resources, and building networks of different organizations—all promoting a common message of disaster resistance.

These objectives reemerged in the 1999 focus groups, but with an expanded vision. Participants in the 1999 groups were more likely to recognize other federal agencies such as Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Small Business Administration (SBA), neighboring communities with shared hazards, non-traditional businesses, small businesses, rural communities, and historic preservation groups as potential partners with which they wanted to connect. In 1999, respondents stressed the importance of keeping diverse community members involved in decision-making and described how expanding the breadth of involvement could help the community achieve the goals of Project Impact.

“One of the things that we did was set up an organizational system with seven subcommittees that allowed different members of the community to participate in making the decisions [regarding] what type of projects we’re going to be doing and I think that’s one of my major goals—to keep those folks interested and helping us make those decisions.”

### **Risk Assessments and Planning**

While several community representatives in the 1998 focus groups included hazard inventories on their lists of objectives, goals tended to include planning activities such as the development of a mitigation plan, prioritization of other activities, and development planning. In contrast, 1999 participants were much more likely to see risk assessment as one of their primary goals. More specifically, these communities were completing or had already completed assessments related to hazard identification, vulnerability, and needs, as well as short and long-term risk-reduction activities. Some participants stressed that they first needed to develop GIS capabilities, have access to HAZUS maps, and obtain other risk assessment tools before these studies could take place. One participant stated that, as a corporate partner, his company’s goal was to conduct a multi-state hazard analysis to help multiple communities with their mitigation planning. Both the planning and the risk assessment activities were seen as useful starting points for helping communities reach their other Project Impact goals.

**Table 3: Examples of Mitigation Activities Discussed by Focus Group Participants.**

<b>Examples of Mitigation Activities</b>
Elevation of structures and protection of agriculture within the flood plain
Buyouts and relocation of structures within the flood plain or storm surge areas
Large flood control projects
Elevation, retrofit, or upgrade transportation infrastructure
Seismic upgrades in municipal buildings
Create greenways
Storm-water management
Restrictions on land development in hazard prone areas
Multi-hazard mitigation approach
Non-structural mitigation in homes and businesses
Stricter building codes
Home retrofit projects
Wildfire mitigation
Back-up emergency generator
Radio system to communicate during emergencies
<b>Unique Activities Mentioned In 1999 Focus Groups</b>
Safe rooms in schools and homes
Improvement of sirens for early warning system
Mitigation against hazardous materials on transportation routes
Drain inspection and clearing
Diversification of risk using HAZUS assessments
Emergency Operations Center Improvements
Projects to ensure essential employees can get to work and meet minimum requirements to keep businesses operational

## **SUSTAINING MOMENTUM**

In 1998, all but one of the participants mentioned momentum as a problem, but group members also seemed uncertain about how to characterize the momentum issue. Clearly, there was an understanding that providing incentives would help to generate and sustain momentum. These participants also requested information on ways to “leverage” PI resources in the communities. The program seemed clearer to participants in 1999. They still saw financial and staffing support as important resources for sustaining momentum; however, more references were made to private partners, the need to better involve federal and national partners, and non-profit community-based groups. Strong leadership, timely decision-making, networking, and keeping disasters in the forefront of people’s minds were all particularly important issues for 1999 participants.

### **Financial Support, Incentives, and other Resources**

Communities felt it was important to remember that while the lack of financial support can cause delays in the initiative’s progress, other resources are also important to sustaining momentum on Project Impact. Discussed below are resources and strategies group members believe can help build momentum.

#### **1. Financial support**

Participants acknowledged the importance of the seed money FEMA provided, but they also suggested other avenues of financial support that were instrumental for consistent progress on mitigation activities, including grants from other federal agencies. One participant suggested that in order to help communities without seed money, FEMA should tie mitigation to Damage Survey Reports (DSRs):

“To keep the effort alive you need support financially. To take that one step further, not every community’s going to be a Project Impact community. So if the community takes on mitigation...when the FEMA inspector is there and writes the DSR to repair it, mitigation should be part of that DSR. He should have the authority, if it costs a thousand dollars or two thousand dollars, to do what you agree on at the site. They should have the authority to make that [decision] so you don’t have to redo this again.”

Particularly in 1998, participants were also skeptical about FEMA’s ability to attract communities to Project Impact with a decrease in or absence of seed money. Even if some community organizations are still interested in Project Impact despite lower levels of funding, many participants doubted these organizations would be able to generate sufficient support from their local governments. As one group member noted:

“My city council is more concerned with providing the basic services...streets and water; and [council members] are very conscious of how they’re spending. Plus there’s some seed money. I don’t think they would have been persuaded to do this without the financial incentive.”

#### **2. Increase in staff devoted to Project Impact activities**

Communities in both 1998 and 1999 focus groups found it challenging to try to sustain activity on the initiative because of a lack of adequate staff involvement. People currently assigned to Project Impact are working over and above their routine workloads. A designated Project Impact coordinator was seen as especially important for communities, and those that were experiencing

problems obtaining or retaining one felt that progress on activities was lagging behind their goals. Lack of staff was a particular problem for smaller communities. Comments reflecting these kinds of needs and concerns included the following:

“There needs to be full-time staff [designated] to this thing. Larger communities can do it, but smaller communities—we really have to hustle to try to keep up with it.”

“In a small community like mine, the elected officials know I’ve been spending a lot of time on this. Sixty hours in October, seventy hours in November, for example, for a city manager who’s supposed to be doing all these other things. Unless there was a good sum of money that the city was giving, I’m not sure my city council would agree that was worthwhile.”

“Somebody has to dedicate a part of their day to that job. You can’t have a person who tries to do it along with many other things. You have got to be able to set aside a few hours a day or several hours a week, whatever it may take in your particular community. And just say that this is going to be part of your duties. Do not overload them with other responsibilities, so that forty hours is no longer enough time to get their normal duties done, and then they try to fit Project Impact along with it. We have got to be able to give our people time do that part of it or you are going to loss momentum in the long run because people are going to run out of energy.”

“I agree that it is very important to have a full time staff person. We have a coordinator [and] that is all that person does. We also asked the state for some funds for an internship for a graduate students. The funds have just been approved and we are now interviewing people for that, for the grant possibilities to assist the coordinator. And basically [the PI coordinator] spends forty hours a week working on this, reaching out to the community, and that is the reason why we have had some success.”

### **3. Commitment from FEMA**

Several communities called for firmer commitments from FEMA. While they did mention funds, many participants were particularly concerned with other forms of support, such as expertise, guidance, and other resources. One participant put it this way:

“I would like to see a five-year commitment from FEMA to sponsor, you know, coordinate, if you will. To sort of get leverage in place so you can get this thing into gear.”

These observations about commitment also focused on the need for greater support and follow-up on the part of FEMA regional offices:

“Regions are [really] good about giving us lip service. I don’t know how many times I specifically asked them for something that never ever came through until I met with them again and they said, ‘Oh yeah, yeah we’ll take care of that.’”

### **4. Sustained private sector involvement**

Participants found that those communities that had succeeded in encouraging more private sector involvement were better able to sustain momentum on Project Impact activities. Clearly, by

doing so, these communities were able to address some challenges related to staffing and access to resources. As one group participant observed:

“The real need is keeping the partners that can help fund these projects.”

“I see some evolution [with the business community] and if we can get them into the project, I see some tremendous financial benefits if FEMA doesn’t cooperate later on.”

## 5. Incentive packages

Participants also noted the need to provide community residents and businesses with mitigation incentives. They suggested that many community members and organizations were motivated by short-term self interest and would probably not follow through with the mitigation activities that their Project Impact initiative promoted without added incentives, such as insurance premium reductions. This was particularly true in locations where recent disaster experience was lacking. For example, one interviewee noted that:

“If you don’t have a recent disaster, [you] need some financial incentives for property owners to mitigate. There’s got to be some pocketbook reason, *enlightened self-interest* is the term you used...Business owners and homeowners are going to have to recognize that they get a pocketbook effect or will likely get a pocketbook effect if they do certain things.”

One new finding in the 1999 focus groups was a greater emphasis on how federal and national partners are important for momentum. The relationship between national partnerships and momentum is discussed in more detail under the *Partnership* section of this report.

## 6. Long-term funding sources

In 1999, participants expressed greater concern with finding long-term funding and establishing the organizational structure necessary to sustain mitigation activities in the future. Group members noted, for example, that:

“Once that grant money is gone, if you don’t have some type of long-term funding you can’t sustain the programs you’ve got going.”

“I think that one of the mistakes [with Project Impact] that we made is calling it a [new] thing that’s coming to town when in fact it’s really just a different way of doing business, a new way of looking at things, and so maybe the name, maybe the fact that there is a project which includes something with a beginning and an end is going to be a barrier.”

Communities were slowly beginning to recognize that they needed to reach out to new community groups—groups they had not previously approached or encouraged to participate—as sources of resources and input. One 1999 respondent contended that many communities are simply not aware of the existing funds that are available to them, and that they need help identifying these sources:

“There was no money first off so instead of doing it top-down we’ve done it bottom-up—organizing up through churches, locally-based groups in cooperation with government. And we’ve gone into communities and found resources or assets that could be applied to the planning process. [We’ve] found great partners in the

manufacturers who have turned up bottom lines and healthcare providers who saw what happened to the healthcare system coming apart in disasters.”

### **Need for Greater Clarity from FEMA**

Participants were less critical of FEMA in this area in 1999 than they were in 1998. The earlier group participants had complained about what they saw as a lack of standards and about unclear deadlines. In general, they felt that FEMA’s goals were unclear, asking, for example: “Was the priority on saving lives or property?” But at the same time, communities did not want numerous guidelines that would lead to unreasonable paperwork demands and burdensome bureaucracy:

“We began the process when we finally got the application guidelines, had the eligibility categories, a.b.c.d...and that was way after we’d already developed the action plan. I don’t know why they didn’t give us those sooner. They didn’t have them developed sooner, or what? So, then I kind of related the various projects to those eligibility categories, but it would have been nice to have that early on because that seemed to have given some direction to what they were after and in fact, at that point they’d put the 72/25 rule on it and then later they canceled the 75/25 rule, just a few weeks later.”

“The initiative is magnificent. The idea is magnificent but we can’t tie it up with a tremendous amount of [paper] work and so forth. But standards would be great.”

“One of the problems with FEMA has been in the regular disaster program, I hope this won’t continue to be a problem in Project Impact. There is a set of rules about this stuff that’s called the Stafford Act. And there’s a set of rules that’s about this thing that’s called 44CFR which I think everybody’s probably pretty well versed in. If those are the only two things you had to live with everything would be fine and you could understand the programs or the mitigation programs, disaster recovery programs, preparedness programs, whatever they were but the problem at FEMA and maybe at all, a lot, of federal agencies is that there is about a four inch thick binder of policy memorandums that come out on a regular basis that I don’t, I haven’t seen any on Project Impact yet and I hope I don’t but the problem is that, you know, there’s always a piece of paper and they’ll show you whether it was written in 1990 in the Florida disaster and then they can bring up another disaster. There’s always a piece of paper....and there’s no way you’re going to know every policy [or] memo written in ten FEMA regions down at FEMA headquarters. I know as it relates to Project Impact it’s probably a non-issue at this point but I just, I hope that doesn’t become a four inch binder of Project Impact memoranda, memos [on] how to run this program.”

While some improvements have been made since 1998, group participants also pointed out that delineation is still needed between Project Impact goals and guideline and those of other federal projects, such as 404:

“I’d like to see FEMA clearly mention delineation between [Project Impact and] its 404 [Section 404 Hazard Mitigation Grant].”

### **Capacity Building**

Participants in both 1998 and 1999 focus groups recognized that a vital component to any sustained effort in Project Impact is building and tapping into local capacities.

## **1. Community capacity building strategies**

In 1998, participants recognized that they needed to strengthen the capacities of their communities to resist disasters. In 1999, group participants also stressed capacity strengthening, along with the idea that their communities needed to build on the existing capacities of organizations in their cities, towns, and counties. They noted that many individuals and groups possess untapped resources and knowledge and that including those individuals and groups in the Project Impact process would build both their own capacities and those of the entire community. As one group member stated:

“Our greatest issue for the future is continuing to build on the capacity and capability of local organizations to join together collaboratively to do immediate response. It’s an organizational and community building issue, if you will...Build and build on relationships in the community. Not just businesses but between the locals.”

Participants also pointed to the importance of demonstrating small successes at first. This allows the community and those involved in the initiative to see results, which in turn encourages continued support of Project Impact activities.

## **2. Ownership**

Discussion group members argued that people need to take ownership of the initiative if communities want Project Impact to sustain momentum. Once capacities are built, other individuals and organizations, eventually take ownership, become excited about the initiative, and will help reach others more effectively. For example, one respondent suggested speaking to larger organizations and associations, then having members of those organizations speak with smaller constituent groups. Additionally, Project Impact needs to be institutionalized at the local level:

“Over time I think that after the MOA, and the signing ceremony, and James Lee Witt comes and all the government officials want to have their photographs taken with him...what you really need is for [locals] to be convinced and supportive in an ongoing way and make the [ideas] of Project Impact and mitigation and planning and cooperation and collaboration institutionalized. If [these ideas] don’t arrive somewhere in stone on somebody’s shelf and become a part of everyday operations on a huge level and on a really small level then it would be easy for [Project Impact] to blow over—particularly when you lose your leader.”

## **3. Regional focus**

Several participants noted that in order to sustain momentum, communities need to reach beyond their local borders and begin to build networks with other communities for a regional focus. As one group member suggested:

“Local government, small town, you’ve got to start establishing those relationships. The community next door...because what happens is everybody knows, oh hell, that guy lives seventeen miles away but he works in my town. [They ask], ‘What is Project Impact?’ and they go home and they talk about it and they find out about it and pretty soon this thing starts to snowball and you [move] region-wide.”

## **Progress and Decision-Making**

Program progress and decision-making processes were new topics that received a high degree of emphasis in the 1999 focus group discussions. Participants expressed frustration about not being able to move ahead with PI activities in a timely manner due to what they saw as government conservatism, the tendency to concentrate exclusively on only one project, an unwillingness to make decisions, a lack of support for decisions once they have been made, and delays brought about by FEMA's schedule.

### **1. Government conservatism**

Participants believe that their local governments need to take more risks in disaster mitigation. This is not to say that they thought governments should be making risky decisions. Rather, group participants expressed frustration about government's reluctance to try new projects and accept new perspectives and its tendency to dismiss good suggestions. Government, group members argued, should be less risk-averse and more willing to make real choices even when there is some uncertainty associated with those choices. The following quotes illustrate these assessments:

"I wish that the government folks were more risk takers. They are so conservative and so worried about taking a risk, and business folks that participate say this better not be another government program that doesn't do anything."

"It just seems like I can't inspire some of the people that are involved in the initiative because they have been sitting there like this waiting for an assessment, for somebody to tell them what their problems are."

Participants value the information risk assessments provide, but they also observe that when officials focus all their attention on studying every decision that needs to be made, nothing gets accomplished. This is particularly frustrating for communities awaiting the results of assessments that are long overdue:

"Hazard assessment: we've been kind of waiting for another organization to produce some earthquake hazard assessment that they promised would be available six months ago, and they haven't delivered the goods yet, and that's kind of frustrating."

### **2. Concentration on only one project at a time**

Group members emphasized that rather than concentrating all their energies on a single large project that could fail in the end, communities need to try multiple activities and see what works. To ensure that programs succeed in accomplishing something, many avenues must be pursued simultaneously. One group member explained this multi-focused approach in this way:

"We did the series of forums this fall which was our kick-off series... We probably scheduled too many forums or we put them on too soon... The idea was just to throw them out there and see what sticks, make some mistakes, do some things right, and start to develop and hone in on what really works the best. Scatter-gun approach: do a lot of little projects, a lot of little different things and then if this got some results and this got results, then hone in there and then forget the rest."



### **3. Inability to make decisions at the local level**

Participants also identified the inability of people to make decisions and commit to decisions that had been made, as well as the reluctance to expend mitigation funds, as major barriers standing in the way of program implementation. Some group participants expressed the hope that educating community residents about local hazards would encourage them to put pressure on officials to make necessary program decisions:

“[By educating the public about hazards, their] expectations will push the government people to make some changes. You know, I can’t get them to spend our money. I say by the end of next year this time we have to have our money all [spent.] You’ve only spent \$70,000 in a year and you’ve got \$430,000 left to go. [They say,] ‘Well, we’ll get an extension on the grant.’ [I tell them,] ‘No we won’t.’”

“Yeah, I appreciate the frustration over not spending the money...I guess in terms of what should communities do would be to maintain a sense of urgency that you need to move this process forward. You can’t just lay back and do things business as usual.”

Group members suggested that officials may well delay making decisions because they believe that once decisions are made, political support will not be forthcoming. They noted that local and regional officials who do make decisions need to feel supported in what they do:

“I think we’d have to remove the political hazards that are within this organization. [If] you ever could do that, I think you would see some sustainability right there because we do have some key people in place right now that are moving this thing forward.”

### **4. Improvement to FEMA’s decision making process and schedule**

Issues of timing and scheduling emerged as important concerns in the focus group discussions. Group participants sometimes expressed frustration over decision-making delays at the federal level. At the same time, they often felt rushed to keep up with FEMA’s priorities—for example, FEMA’s need to schedule the signing ceremony. Group members suggested that FEMA needs to improve its own decision making and funding schedules, so as not to hamper local efforts. As one participant observed:

“I know I have sensed with FEMA an ebb and flow...at the regional level. For example, when they ran out of travel money toward the end of the fiscal year, [nobody] was available to come [help] us. We had to put off our signing ceremony for several months simply because the region was out of travel money and nobody could come down for the ceremony. That’s a little thing but that held off a piece of momentum generation. The signing ceremony is supposed to be a big deal.”

### **Leadership**

Another important finding that emerged in 1999 was an increased call for local leadership to sustain the momentum of Project Impact and to keep momentum strong. Suggestions included the importance of having a high-profile local champion, particularly someone who is not part of government, as well as the importance of having “leadership that will lead to action.” Focus group participants put it this way:

“I think that you need someone who has passion, who can lead the charge. I think that if it is too diffuse and everyone gets some nice ideas but nobody is really leading the charge, then you have a problem.”

“I went to three meetings and they were like carbon copies of each other. And then I became the chair person...and said, ‘Wouldn’t it help if we got five or six of us out of this room and just get focused on getting started?’ We had thirty people in a room and every time we met, we were hashing the same stuff over again...And our goal was, ‘Let’s get something set. Let’s get some success...’ It’s that it keeps going forward to gain the momentum.”

### **Public Attention to Disaster Risks and the Need for Mitigation**

In 1998 and 1999, many participants stressed the notion that disasters are needed to encourage community residents to take mitigation steps. It seems odd that those most involved in a disaster mitigation program would call for a disaster event, but clearly participants are frustrated with the high level of public apathy they are encountering in their communities and, as a result, some expressed the idea that perhaps a disaster, or at least the threat of one, was needed to motivate people to accept change. In 1999, group members generated a number of suggestions for keeping mitigation issues in the forefront of people’s minds and sustaining support for Project Impact activity. These include capitalizing on threats and tailoring program language to the audience the program is trying to reach.

#### **1. Disaster threats and the need for mitigation must be kept in the forefront of people’s minds**

This can be accomplished in several ways:

- ▶ Through building on the momentum after smaller disasters. As one participant noted:  
  
“A good disaster would help...to get somebody’s attention. You don’t want loss of lives and [have] a lot of damage but it’s the recurrence of these type of things that gets peoples’ attention.”
- ▶ Through taking note of disasters in neighboring communities:  
  
“We don’t need to end up like them, so let’s do something.”
- ▶ Through encouraging people to have more of a sense of ownership over their environment:  
  
“It needs to become a way of life, because somewhere down the line, I may not be here to see it but my children may and my grandchildren will so we do something. This is part of our legacy we leave behind—a good safe environment.”
- ▶ Through education and outreach (such as community mailings):  
  
“It’s got to be an educational thing, it has got to be constant and you have to keep it up.”

Communities need strategies that can be employed to educate the public, particularly since a community's memory of disasters fades over time and generations. As group members indicated:

"Time is passing. I spoke recently with a class of third graders who all grew up in the [San Francisco] Bay area. They've never experienced an earthquake. So an experience that motivates the community fades."

"I call it the 'Oldest Indian' syndrome. If the 'Oldest Indian' doesn't remember the event occurring, then it's not a risk. So it gets back to the risk assessment piece that you are talking about. People wanting to know what [the risk really is.]"

## **2. Tailoring program language to the target audience**

In developing and carrying out local programs, Project Impact personnel need to employ language the public understands. Group participants observed that the word mitigation is still misunderstood by the public, and even by those closely involved in Project Impact. How communities define mitigation and the words they choose to substitute for the term affect what activities they choose to pursue. When providing alternatives for the term mitigation, some participants stressed words such as survival, remaining functional, and recovery. Communities and FEMA need to consider and address a number of issues: whether or not the term mitigation is adequately understood by the general public as well as those most active in the Project Impact initiative; whether or not alternative terminology needs to be developed to promote the project and educate the public; and whether or not communities are still focusing on response and recovery instead of mitigation and, if so, how this is likely to affect program implementation and outcomes. These comments illustrated the concerns group members expressed regarding program language:

"I would like a nice clean simple understanding of the definition of mitigation. There are one hundred different definitions of mitigation because we've talked to one hundred different people and I don't want to be asking for, talking about hard mitigation, soft mitigation, I just want to talk about the same thing and if we don't understand it, I'm not sure how we are trying to share that with people necessarily dealing with Project Impact."

"Although I use the word mitigation, we have been trying to stress other words like viability and survivability. Because you can mitigate and still not survive the disaster. That is, mitigation doesn't guarantee that you're still standing, I mean, as a business afterwards. I mean, theoretically, you could as a individual but I'm talking for the private sector mitigation doesn't guarantee survivability, but it's survivability what we ultimately want. Mitigation can increase the odds of survivability but it still kind-of misses the point of what our end goal is. Our end goal isn't to mitigate. Our end goal is to survive and be functional and recover...One of the things we learned on our educational outreach program...is to present comprehensive programs on earthquake hazards. In other words, you cover the hazard and then the risk assessment. That's to raise the awareness and then to measure what is at risk. Then to try to offer strategies or actions that communities or businesses can take to increase their survivability. That's why even our seminars were called Earthquake Survival Strategies for Businesses, and leaving out the mitigation word, because mitigation to me is a technical insider's term. I mean, when I'm trying to talk to lay people, they don't necessarily know what that means. Also, survival is a more dramatic word, and that's more of the end-game that we're [aiming] at anyway."

## EXPANSION OF THE INITIATIVE TO ALL SEGMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY

By and large, the suggestions for enhancing the integration of Project Impact into all segments of the community offered by 1999 participants were consistent with those offered by participants in 1998. Expanding outreach activities to reach different community groups was a frequently-cited recommendation, and community representatives provided examples of several strategies. These included launching programs to increase public awareness, using existing groups, and activating multiple projects that would appeal to a variety of interests. The group discussions in 1999 revealed some increased emphasis on involving vulnerable groups in Project Impact. Finally, political integration was proposed in both 1998 and 1999 as vital to the expansion of community involvement.

### Community Outreach

#### 1. Public awareness

Public education was one component of community outreach that participants believed could help expand Project Impact and mitigation activity. While there was still a heavy focus on hazard preparedness education in their discussions, participants maintained that the general public needs to be more aware about mitigation steps they themselves can take to make their homes and businesses more disaster resistant. Mass mailings were seen in both years as a good tool for initial outreach, but participants also felt outreach needed to include additional, more active steps. Some suggested giving away emergency radios and holding monthly meetings that everyone in the community could attend. Others proposed including on voting ballots an option to earmark sales tax revenues for mitigation. Participants also advocated developing larger outreach projects such as a *Project Impact Awareness Day*:

“We had a Project Impact Awareness Day where you had county emergency management, state emergency management, FEMA, the [local] emergency manager, Red Cross, Chamber of Commerce were there. Everybody reaching out. This was done on a Saturday at a Home Depot parking lot where they pull in over ten thousand people in a day. So it was very effective. But you need also somebody to go to the private businesses to get them involved. Somebody to take the ball and run with it and contact these people.”

One participant drew parallels between Project Impact and community policing strategies, stressing that it is important to build relationships and educate a community during non-crisis periods:

“I’m going to go back to my community policing experience. When we did that what we were able to do is go to our public, go to our citizens, our bosses, in a different uniform, without the guns on—in this case without having the boots on and the mud-slickers. We’re going to them in a positive, proactive way, instead of when they’re distressed or angry and upset, and it’s far better to build that relationship in the front end, so that it goes a little better in the back end. I hadn’t really thought about the parallels until today, but I think that there are some.”

#### 2. The role of existing groups

Focus group participants argued that media involvement—and involvement that goes beyond participation by a local weather channel—was of paramount importance for reaching the broader community. If communities are able to tap into regional media support, they can put hazard mitigation into a larger context for the public and raise the public’s expectation for disaster resistance by showing what other communities are doing. Interestingly, small towns sometimes had an easier

time garnering local media support to cover events than did larger communities. Overall, attracting media support was seen by participants as key to outreach activities. As one participant observed:

“You know I could envision things in forms of communication like advertisements, people on the golf channel, NBC nightly news,...Project Impact on a VISA ad, you know, ‘We’re a proud member!’”

Other existing groups that participants contend should be involved in spreading the Project Impact message include high schools, grammar schools, historical societies, government departments other than emergency management, volunteer groups, children’s organizations such as sport groups or Boy and Girl scouts, larger corporations, and members of planning boards. One participant identified professional groups and larger businesses as effective groups to approach smaller businesses. Another described the value of non-governmental sources in reaching out to the business community:

“That is why we have been using the university a lot, I think. Just because, especially for small businesses, it’s very tough to get those business owners or someone from the business to come to a meeting and sit and listen to a meeting because their time is very valuable. So by actually sending the university students out to the businesses, just to initially give them some information. And then, if they’re interested in the project, to actually go back and sit down and talk to them.”

Finally, participants also highlighted why targeting and seeking assistance from existing groups is important to Project Impact. These groups are successful in getting the word out to segments of the community that have not yet heard about Project Impact, and they are excellent sources of ideas and direction for the initiative:

“The radio...the first thing was the news media interface. Just addressing the issues that we were running with Project Impact funds. Then the phone calls came from the various organizations. We are strong in the Emergency Management Office, are strong throughout the community in both dealing with the community councils, dealing with the school district, in dealing with the private industry...So, therefore, for us it is relatively easy to get into organizational levels and spread the word that way...So it’s easy for us to take not only the emergency management aspect of what a normal day-to-day job is, but also to add into it the significance of Project Impact. We have a lot of the volunteers, and that’s been one of the ways that has been the easiest for us to get the word out the quickest. All the volunteer organizations right across, all the church organizations and those types of things as well as some state and federal agencies that are involved...Fielding all the suggestions to spend money becomes the other issue, and there’s frustration...because there are so many projects that these folks see need to be done, and there’s limited funding, especially in our case. There’s limited funding availability, so collecting the enthusiasm...and focusing it into the agreed-upon projects will now be the test...”

“I think, that you have to be courageous enough to step out beyond the politics and just get out there and talk with people...This is tough, because...the people who are doing things and are working hard, they have bought into it and think that it is important. But, I know that our Deputy Commissioner, the last thing that he wants to do is to talk to all those politicians. He just wants to...get things done. Unfortunately, the reality is that if you really are going to get it done you need to work with the politicians. That is their job. They’re there to represent the community in such a way that things happen. I think expanding it to all areas of the community, to go out to those public officials and to the businesses and get them to tell us. If you

go to the Public Works Department and say, 'If time and money weren't the issue what are the projects that you would be after? What are the kinds of things that would improve how you do what you do?'...I don't know the answer. I think the answer would be to go and ask the people who are the experts to gather and bring that information. That is the idea of somebody who is responsible or in focus. They can get that information, they can tabulate it and coordinate and put together that information. And again, they can go around to the businesses and say, 'Well, what are the greatest impacts in the community from the business standpoint? What things happen?'...I think, that is how you get involvement, you get all those areas to give you the ideas. I think part of the biggest mistakes that we can make is [making decisions based on] 'Oh, this will be good for you.' [Thinking] we've got to anticipate whatever [they] want instead of [asking them]. We've got to be responsible."

Encouraging participation on the steering committee is another way to foster active participation by existing groups and use their unique sources of knowledge about the community as a planning resource. Group members observed, for example, that:

"We've got a couple of corporations down there that are very interested. I talked to a guy from a large business last week...and I said, 'You really need to come to the steering committee meetings. We meet monthly and, at that time we had a report from all the subcommittees and all the project updates and all that stuff and I think you'll feel a little more as a part of it.'"

"I think part of the success that we've had has been because of our steering committee makeup. We have about thirty people on the steering committee, all who have an equal voice in the process and we offer them majority rules. We have private sector, public sector, non-profit, and I think our relationship with the higher education is working out well. We have two universities there, and one of the universities, their engineering school has agreed to be the residence for the HAZUS program, which we are piloting. That got the education interest up, and when they did that, the other school kind of noticed, and now we've gotten the Geology department from another university kind of involved now, because it's kind of like, well, 'If they're doing that, we ought to be doing something too.' It's kind of finding out what pushes peoples' buttons, both individually and corporation-[or community]-wide."

### **3. Combining multiple projects and approaches with outreach to a variety of groups**

While group participants recognized the importance of involving multiple groups in Project Impact, some admitted that they were less successful in achieving that goal. Some communities were taking an all-hazards approach and simultaneously targeting multiple groups—such as schools, faith communities, neighborhood associations, health-care associations for the elderly, and smaller businesses—and inviting them to serve on their subcommittees:

"In our community...we work a lot with the local universities to go out in the community. In most of our communities, these local universities are well received in the businesses and in the homes. And [local universities are also good for] working with neighborhoods to develop neighborhood groups, specifically for our home retrofit project. Just to kind of diversify."

Other communities were only focusing on businesses, but approaching them on a one-on-one basis:

"It's getting the business community, the small businesses. And again, one-on-one seems to work. But getting them to come and knock on our door? Nobody has come to knock on my door yet from the business community. I have to knock on their door."

Participants found that having multiple program components and encouraging a variety of different measures was an effective way of drawing in different stakeholders. Strategies also need to be customized and individualized. As participants observed:

"Having a variety of different types of programs—and...of interest to a lot of different stakeholders—is important as well. If you only do one or two projects you're not going to get the whole community"

"Individualized information goes a long way toward getting people interested and involved. Particularly I'm thinking of information that's detailed enough to explain risk to someone's own neighborhood, their own house, or their children's school or the place they work in...In that regard, I think there could be potentially a lot of benefits using the model form web sites to attain that information so...it's possible to click on pages that show dam burst inundation, flooding, and specific shaking hazards, and I think having that kind of personalized information available where people interact with each other for details...can be a way to expand it out and recruit people...to help Project Impact."

"Translate [Project Impact] and put it in the context of 'What does this all mean, and what can you do about it?' because otherwise it's just information in a vacuum. It's like just giving a weather report. Okay that's good, you need to start with that, what is the weather forecast for the coming season? But, what does that mean to your town and what can you do about it?"

Although the need to reach vulnerable populations in the community was discussed in 1998, its importance was given greater emphasis in 1999. In 1998, one participant advocated a resource inventory—essentially a capacity assessment—to recognize untapped resources in the community that might help vulnerable or previously excluded segments. Although recognition of excluded groups was still not pervasive throughout the four 1999 focus groups, several respondents did stress not only that vulnerable segments of the community need to be helped by Project Impact, but also that representatives from these segments of the population should be involved in deciding the direction of the community's Project Impact program. Participants pointed out that despite the need to reach those who are most vulnerable, these members of the community are difficult to engage in activities, because vulnerable groups often have other problems to worry about. Communities need to make the added effort to develop strategies to attract these vulnerable segments of the population to the initiative and to devise ways to support their presence and participation. As group members observed:

"One way to spread the message is to conduct some sort of resource inventory...[of the population]. For instance, the part of our community that speaks Spanish is not involved and it needs to be. We have some black members, but not enough. [We need] the elderly, people who have handicaps, people who can't hear. To me, all of those people should be involved and knowledgeable if the program is really to work."

“Well, we’ve actually tried to identify some of the most vulnerable populations, and what we’ve come up with are population groups that you might refer to as the isolated—either they’re geographically or economically or culturally isolated or maybe physically isolated like the senior citizens who tend to live alone—and then really try to focus our efforts toward that group as opposed to putting together something that is intended for all. It’s a lot more work but that’s been a value.”

“Private citizens, the faith community, the university, rural communities,...private sector, business, and as a result there’s, there’s this forum, there is a place for us to come together and talk about something that we have in common and to connect resources. So it’s like the ultimate networking opportunity, and so I think that’s one way to extend it beyond traditional places.”

“You mentioned minorities, inner city, and what not. In our area, unfortunately, it is an inner city area that, when we do flood, has received the worst of it the past couple years, and I gather that it’s like that in most cities.”

“I think inner city problems and, you know, there’s so many other problems that people in inner cities need to worry about. It would be nice if you could get those folks to listen [but], they’ve got so many other things that they have to deal with that natural disasters is probably the least, the last thing on their mind. You know, you’ve got a big social problem here.”

## **Political Integration**

Focus group participants called for increased political integration to aid in expanding Project Impact throughout their communities. They warned that Project Impact should not be too politicized, because political polarization could make integrating the program into the community more difficult. Politicians need to see that voters are behind mitigation efforts and will support pro-mitigation decisions. Furthermore, hazard mitigation needs to become a priority beyond local governments, reaching to the level of the state legislature. Generating support from department heads and the Council of Mayors helps, but participants stated that their political leadership needs to hear about Project Impact from state and federal governments, because political leaders tend not to listen to local emergency managers. Along these lines, one group interviewee noted:

“So I think that...if FEMA wants to do something to help, [they should] target a lot of information toward the decision makers, the people who have the influence on the city council, the mayors, our state representatives, people who talk to people. The mayors don’t hang out with guys like me. They hang out with the local state representatives, anyone who’s got a vote to do something.”

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Participants were asked to report on the strategies that their community used to develop partnerships and to evaluate the effectiveness of those strategies. Indeed, remarks centering on partnerships permeated group discussions over the entire two hours. Suggestions regarding partnering are included in this section, although some of the points made here are equally relevant to other topics, such as maintaining momentum, expanding community involvement, program challenges, and needed program improvements.

Comments on partnership issues that were made by group participants can be separated into five categories: issues related to local partners; state, federal and national partners; regional partners;



community partnerships; and level of partnership activity. These topics are discussed separately in the sections that follow.

## **Local Partners**

### **1. Strategies to attract partners**

Communities reported that going to regular meetings held by local organizations—perhaps taking a half hour of their monthly meeting—is frequently more effective than waiting for partners to come to Project Impact meetings or events. One community representative suggested a mild “carrot-and-stick” approach to attracting partners:

“Developing partnerships is easy for us. I issue permits, big open permits for the city’s offices, and to get the permits out of our office you have to initiate the Project Impact partnership form...We found that very useful. We invite them [permit applicants] to sit down and to at least hear, you know, our Project Impact coordinator’s pitch, and before they leave, normally the permit is complete and they’ve signed up.”

Stressing partnerships instead of regulation and oversight seemed to be an effective strategy to attract business to Project Impact. As this participant explained:

“I think the private sector has appreciated us approaching them as a partnership versus, what I was kind of resistant to myself, you know, to do regulatory changes. We were coming in and saying ‘Hey, join us and we’ll join you.’”

Holding Project Impact “expos” and “disaster days” is an effective way to engage multiple partners, including businesses, schools, the Red Cross, fraternal organizations, and other local groups. These events attract media attention, provide businesses with publicity, and are enjoyable events in which partners can participate. Media support is typically instrumental in attracting local partners to the initiative. One group participant explained that:

“When you sit on so many committees and you’re community oriented, you find them to be a waste of time in many cases, and you start losing people, losing interest. That is why you need an action plan and you need action. So what we did is we came upon one thing, that can basically hit every one in these emergencies, and that was the radio station [for public relations]. And we found no resistance at all, we asked all constituencies. ‘Yeah, what a great idea. Everybody’s on board.’ What happened? It went fast, and we’re on line to success. All of a sudden, the people are once again interested. All of the other committees they sit on are still wasting time, rehashing the same thing over and over again.”

Expos give partners business and publicity, and at the same time, they can be a source of income for mitigation initiatives. Several communities charged their partners and contractors to set up booths at these events:

“We go to our partners who are out there and [say] ‘That will cost you two hundred bucks,’ and we raise about four to five thousand dollars a year just, you know, now with that money.”

A common theme in the discussions about drawing in partners is the opinion that businesses will only become involved if they find a way that they can benefit from participation. Communities

must be effective in pointing out how taking part in Project Impact can provide either profits or other types of benefits, such as publicity:

“Public relations [for businesses], even if it is not making money, is about having a positive public image by being part of something important in the community.”

“Coming from the private industry side, the great challenge is convincing or trying to demonstrate to the private industry that there are benefits of participating. I work for a bank and we talk about all the low interest loans and stuff like that. That all sounds really, really great. The problem is that my bank, like any other private industry, our first priority is to make a profit. We’re in business to make a profit, that is why we’re there. I think a great challenge as we try to form these public-private partnerships is that all parties need to see what their benefit is. What is good for them? And sometimes it deals with profitability, and sometimes it deals with responding and being good community members...How do we get the private industries to see that this is something that is going to benefit them as well as the whole community?”

As suggested in some of these quotes, private sector involvement is encouraged if businesses can be shown how to use Project Impact as a publicity tool. This, said participants, will attract businesses to the initiative and keep them involved. Partners also need recognition for the work they contribute. This is not only a courtesy that should be extended to partners, but is also a tangible commendation that can be used to promote the partner’s community involvement. One community even produced a newsletter for this purpose:

“We also do a partner newsletter. We send it out periodically, praising our partners and saying the different things we’ve done, and keep them interested, and let them know we appreciate their efforts.”

## **2. Attracting non-traditional partners**

As noted earlier, some 1999 participants also stressed the importance of reaching out to neighborhood associations. Partners need to be shown how they connect to each other and how working together benefits themselves as well as the community at large. Sometimes, this will involve addressing different approaches used by the private and the public sector. Other times, community conflict and racial or class-based tensions will have to be overcome. Many of focus group participants felt that the partners currently involved with Project Impact do not adequately represent their communities; therefore, those active in Project Impact need to make a greater effort to reach non-traditional partners. As these quotes indicate, many focus group participants are sensitive to community diversity and are looking for ways to overcome divisions within their communities:

“The other issue is showing the private partnerships in business where they can plug in, because most of them want to and are ready but have no place to plug in and don’t know how to do it with government. To bring a diverse table together and [find] ways to connect the entities, [build] bridges between government and private business and government and the neighborhoods so it’s not threatening, it’s not a confrontational issue.”

“The public-private sector partnership is probably one of the things I see as the most difficult to be made. Recognizing the difference between minimum standards as they relate to collapse in a seismic event versus serviceability or usability, operation ability of a business afterward. It’s hard to get that message out in the financial and political environment that exists out there.”

"When I called around to ask for Project Impact communities to talk to, I talked to only fifty-year-old white males, and when you look around the table at us we're all close, excuse me, all but two of us are close to that category, and I'm going to question that a little bit, only from the standpoint of if we reflect our communities in our planning boards and planning groups."

### **3. Partnerships with educational institutions and government agencies**

In both years, participants asserted that the partnerships they had developed with schools and local government agencies had strengthened the initiative in their communities. Some had developed emergency management curricula and individual classes at universities and colleges, while others hired graduate student interns to help on specific activities. As noted by focus group discussants:

"We've used local university students to put up web sites, and that is a great project...Both communications courses and for computer sciences divisions."

"But even if you don't have a major university, your community colleges have those same courses like computer science and stuff like that. They would love to jump into some of that stuff. We just created a small business video with a partnership with a technical school."

### **4. Leadership**

Participants in the 1998 groups were more likely to stress the importance of leadership in attracting partners. As those group members observed:

"In our community, the Mayor has had tremendous crucial involvement contacting the businesses and they've responded well to the Mayor's personal involvement. I realize that can't happen in every community. Our mayor's retired and has a lot of time to do that. There's nobody better to get a business to respond, usually, than the mayor as a personal contact. [I would say] we have the advantage of that existing network to build upon."

"In our case, being a small city, maybe this is true for all cities, but I think one of the keys to sustaining momentum is we're going to have to establish some project leadership outside of city government. We've got to get some key players who are going to provide leadership, and we've been able to do that on some of our projects so far. We've told them to hang in there, and over time, if we're supposed to sustain this beyond two years, we're hoping that others will step forward and be willing to be leaders outside of government."

However, leadership remained a major issue in the 1999 discussion groups. Participants called for leaders who are aggressive and willing to go out into the community to rally support. Getting key community leaders involved will also attract others:

"If he is the leader in the community and you get him on board, he brings other people on board. So I think you need to focus your energy on some key people when you start the program. They bring other people with them. You don't have to talk to each individual person. You'll have people knocking at your door and what not."

## **5. Partners need personal connection to Project Impact**

Participants in the 1999 groups stressed that communities need to find people within partner organizations who have particular interests, and then connect them with a relevant project or make use of their special skills. Strategies must be employed to create a sense of personal involvement and stake in the program. This, said participants, was the only way people will place Project Impact participation as a priority in their already busy lives:

“The only strategy that I’ve seen that has really worked is one-on-one. Where you can go find someone who has a true interest and work with them and cultivate that interest.”

“You know, people are busy with their own personal lives...Everybody’s working, you run your kids to the soccer games and to the ballet practice and to this and that and you ask somebody to come down and spend two or three hours with us and it’s like—What three hours? I don’t have any three hours left...[I’ve got too many] things going on. You got this general apathy where everybody’s more or less focused on their own personal life and not the broader community good. But then beyond that, most people don’t personalize into their own lives the liabilities that are out there...I think one of the things we’re trying to accomplish is to get information out, to try and educate people, to give them a sense of ‘This is personally important to me,’ and I don’t know whether we’re going to succeed or not, but that’s the road we’re headed down.”

Participants explained that meetings and activities need to be fun for people to remain active. They also suggested minimizing the time commitment involved for partners. Subcommittees are one way to encourage broad involvement while minimizing the time commitment:

“We want their ideas, their financial support, so we try to minimize the time they have to commit to it.”

When time is given, this participation should be seen as a donation in the same way that financial assistance is:

“The bulk of the private sector donations and other agencies was in their time. Because we put the programs together, we bring in the best experts of the USGS and structural engineers and others to give a whole day...and there’s a value to that. There’s a big value to that when you start asking, you know, how much, what was the dollar value of all the time you put in over the year.”

### **State, Federal, and National Partners**

One of the new partnership issues raised by 1999 focus group participants concerned the lack of knowledge many state, federal, and national partners seemed to have about Project Impact activities. Often, when communities contacted these partners, the people they spoke with had either never heard of Project Impact or were unable or unwilling to offer assistance. In response to this seeming lack of interest in the program, communities are calling for better communication from national head offices to their regional or local representatives and for more information to be distributed on what tangible resources these partners are willing to provide to local communities.

## **1. Involvement of state and federal agencies**

Focus group participants believe that state and federal agencies need to be better informed about Project Impact and its goals. Group members suggested that state agencies will be enticed to participate in Project Impact only if it can be shown how the initiative might benefit them. As discussion group members put it:

“The same thing is true for the state. You know, [when] we’re talking about emergency management in our state, there’s kind of this experience of them taking care of themselves...and hanging onto their own and not sharing the resources and so we really have to play these same kinds of games to continue to get support and funding for our success.”

“It’s having all federal and state agencies buy into the program...Other state agencies don’t know what’s going on, and the same with the federal government, and I think it’s got to be universal that they all are partners and when you call them, they all know what Project Impact is about.”

“Number one, I don’t think Project Impact and FEMA have worked closely enough with the states. There is also a potential of another 12.5% of money if you work with the states rather than creating problems between the state and FEMA and that’s exactly what we have a problem with. How that ever came about, because nothing else comes directly federal, everything else, hazard mitigation, is funneled through the states.”

“We have a strong state coordinator who has been very helpful to us, but it seems like over time, that’s going to need to continue to be there. The state coordinator is going to need to be doing some things at a state-wide level that would benefit all cities or many cities. So we can get some more efficient cities if the state coordinator is doing things like dealing with the insurance companies at the state level, the regulatory commission that allows credits, the lending institutions at the corporate level which are often state institutions, state banks and so on. So that we don’t have to duplicate that effort in every city.”

## **2. Dissemination of information to and about national and federal partners**

Also new in 1999 focus groups was a pervasive complaint regarding the activity of national and federal partners. Participants report that local offices of national and federal partners are not aware of Project Impact. The Project Impact message has not trickled down through national and federal partner agencies to personnel within organizations with which local communities interact. Communities do not know whom to contact within these organizations to generate results and need to be better informed about what national and federal partners are able to contribute at the local level. These observations contain examples of the problems local Project Impacts participants are experiencing:

“We have several national sponsors, but we’re trying to get the local part of the national sponsors to play. It’s an entirely different game. They don’t want to play.”

“You call them up, they don’t know what your talking about–‘Project what?’ FEMA needs to do a better job if they’re going to negotiate these partnerships at the national level to ensure that the agency understands completely what it is that we’re, that

FEMA is asking them to do and what types of support the communities may be looking for and then get that down through the ranks.”

“FEMA quite often lists the number of national partners that they have. What do these national partners do? They don’t help us. Are they helping you? Are they giving FEMA money? I don’t know what they are doing. And the local people... they don’t want to play. They will play during hurricane season, because that is reimbursement, that’s dollars right there, real quick. But, as far as some of the other national partners, I would like to know what they are doing?”

“Shortly after we were approved for assistance and were told there was another federal agency we could go to for assistance, I called them up and the guy said ‘...[This project is] not in our budget and, therefore, we can’t do it for you.’ [In] terms of interagency cooperation [FEMA] could send the word down: ‘When you get requests from Project Impact communities for assistance you will do what you need to do to move your money around to give them the assistance, within reason.’”

“FEMA says ‘Oh yeah...we now have one thousand national-level partners.’ All I have is a list of 100 partners. There’s nothing to tell me except in isolated cases, what is their commitment? What can they do for us? What can they do for the community and the initiative? There’s no sharing of that information.”

Participants argued that national partners could be doing a better job of publicizing Project Impact. They suggested that national advertisers could include the Project Impact logo on their television commercials and others (such as the credit card company partners, for example) could put a small note in their monthly bills or reduce their interest rates for communities impacted by a disaster. One 1999 participant also expressed the view that FEMA has shunned offers of federal partnerships unless the organizations can offer financial resources. This person contended that FEMA needs to approach and accept non-traditional national partners that have other resources to offer besides money:

“I originally called and asked how we could become a national partner...and the issue was if we could pay for some events. We could be a national partner, but they didn’t have room for a national partner that [could] get out and do things without giving them money.”

## **Regional Partners**

Consistent with what DRC heard in 1998, 1999 discussion group members expressed a desire for regional-level partnerships of various kinds. Such activities could include fostering partnerships with regional organizations, with other Project Impact or non-Project Impact communities, and with neighboring communities, in order to address regional hazards. In 1999, many participants demonstrated a genuine resolve to rise above the competitiveness that often exists within regions, and they saw how Project Impact might actually help this process:

“[In the regional communities] they’re very independent and are kind of semi-competitive and our biggest problem is working together.”

“Project Impact is a regional effort for us, which is new and that’s our biggest plus, I think, is being regional besides the money. The funds are, of course, helpful but just the fact that we can say ‘We’re not run in no city, we’re not run in no county, we’re something bigger than that.’ That gives us credibility.”

"Our decision to go to a regional-type nature was a strategy to include these larger corporations, because most of them are located in our county. So in order to get the big business in the area involved in this, we decided to make it a regional nature."

### **Partnerships with other Project Impact Communities**

In 1998, community representatives felt they needed more information and contact with other Project Impact communities. This need was also expressed by community representatives in 1999. Participants continue to believe that they are not learning enough from communities that have already been through the Project Impact start-up process. Although some did recognize that FEMA is making an effort to collect and distribute Project Impact success stories, they also opined that much of the information that is being distributed is primarily for public relations purposes rather than for transferring program development knowledge. Those involved with programs in newer Project Impact communities seemed almost desperate for information about how to develop programs that succeed, and they expressed frustration about how difficult it is to obtain that information:

"We are all reinventing the wheel."

"They give you a tool kit, which is insulting to my intelligence...They assume you're barely literate."

"A consultant gave me the brochure from [another community]...I said, 'Whoa, look at that. We just did a lame brochure. I wish I'd had this. It would have been a nice one.' If FEMA said, 'You've done a brochure, send us 200 of them,' and then distributed them to other communities."

"[FEMA says we want success stories] constantly, constantly, constantly. But what do they do with them? Sometimes on the Internet, I will see a story about a community that initiated a certain type of activity or whatever and how well it worked. I've, I wouldn't say [FEMA is] doing nothing about it. They are trying to compile some success stories and to share those with others who can benefit from them, basically on the Internet."

"But there doesn't seem to be a strategy to share, to make this much more effective instead of every community kind of doing they're own thing. I'm not saying that communities are cookie cutters, because they're not, but there has to be some [basic] information that's the same."

### **Partner Activity Levels**

In 1998, focus group participants reported devoting a great deal of time and energy to attracting partners to the initiative. By 1999, however, participants were more concerned with retaining partners and increasing their level of involvement. Communities have found that they must seek out partners that will provide quality resources and that want to be actively involved in the program. It is not productive to have a plethora of partners if most are inactive. If partnering is to have an effect, it must consist of much more than token support for program goals. Appropriate activities must also be in place in which partners can become involved. Group participants warned that if the Project Impact organizing committee does not have something for partners to do once they are signed, then partners are likely to drop out of the program. Additionally, group members stressed that it is important for the Project Impact coordinator and the steering committee to know which person or persons within partner organizations they should contact after the signing ceremony. Often an upper-level executive signs the Memorandum of Agreement, but that individual may not be the

one who will actually be responsible for carrying out partnership activities. The following quotes reflect group participants' ideas about the importance of establishing meaningful partnerships with organizations that are truly willing to make a commitment to the program:

"Nobody says it's a bad idea, but then they'll say 'What do you want us to do?' and we've got to have something very specific."

"It doesn't matter how many partners you sign up if you have five to seven percent doing all of it."

"We have well over two hundred, two hundred fifty partners, people who have signed up. But so much of it is people that have signed up and you don't ever see them again. I mean, how can you not sign up? You have to believe in this but then it's kind of like, how do you get them back?"

"Part of the problem is if you're having that many meetings, you've got to have something that has some teeth that you sit down, find a project that you're going to work with. We had this problem. We started a year before we became a Project Impact community and we had to sit down and say 'Whoa, time out.' We can have thirty-five guys sign this piece of paper and say 'Yeah, Project Impact's great.' Five guys show up, what good is it?"

"It's not important that they're members of our organization or not cause we're getting nothing from them anyway."

"I thought there was a little competition there among some of the officials in the communities to see who could get the most partners signed on and I have to tell you that it is quality not quantity...I had to say to them, 'No, no, you don't understand the concept here. It's not just to go out and talk to every John Doe you meet on the street and have him sign a piece of paper that he or she wants to be a Project Impact partner.' My God, you know, you've got to be looking somewhat toward people who can contribute somehow to the success of this initiative."

"It was because we approached [the partnership component] very slowly trying to get not just get quantity of partners but quality of partners to get the program going. It's been going very well. We're having a lot of successes in that area."

"We're beginning to get to the point where we're saying 'We're going to have this [event on] this date. Can we use your facility? Will you give us a discount of some kind?' That's beginning to be better."

### **THE PROJECT IMPACT START-UP PROCESS**

Suggestions given by focus group participants for improving the PI start-up process fall under six major categories: clarity regarding program guidelines; suggestions for understanding the community context; the integral role that is played by the PI coordinator in project initiation; the usefulness of PI program flexibility; the helpfulness of mentoring and networking; and the support FEMA can provide during initial implementation.



## Clarity Regarding Program Guidelines and Responsibility

In both 1998 and 1999, communities requested clarity on two levels: first, they stressed the need for written guidelines from FEMA; and second, they spoke of the necessity of designating a person who can be responsible for providing clear and definitive answers to questions regarding PI. While participants in both years pointed to the need for greater clarity, this need was given even greater emphasis in the 1999 focus groups. Comments about clarification centered on issues such as the need for written guidelines and templates, as well as designation of a specific FEMA representative who could serve as a "single point of contact" when communities have questions about the program.

### 1. Written guides and templates

As these comments illustrate, communities believe they need much more written guidance than they are currently receiving:

"Guidance, yes, from above that says, 'Yes, you got this grant now, but now you need to draft your Memorandum of Understanding, or do your hazard analysis and this is a sample one.' We were the first Project Impact community in [this state], it's like we don't know who to call or what to do or who to go to or anything like that, to know what to do."

"First of all it would be helpful if FEMA had a better road-map. I don't know about the rest of you but when we started, it was, 'Gee you've been selected. There's this money coming, and we think that we need you to do this by this date. We'll let you know, and it hasn't been much better than that from the beginning...We have to be flexible and I think that's okay but it was hard to get started without a clear idea of what we needed to do.'"

"...The other thing that I want to say was that we don't want to be told what to do, but I think...we need guidelines. If they could send us to EMI before we get the money, maybe that would put us all at least on the same book, if not on the same page. And so we get the general training work and guidelines. Talk about inconsistency, we are trying to get reimbursed for some stuff we were told by [the region] that we were going to be reimbursed for. But one of our contacts left and another came in. The rules have changed two or three times, not that it is big bucks on personal travel, but you would at least like to know what's going to happen. The other thing is, just on reimbursements, there is that frustration from our level on what is the process. Everyone wants original documents-the state, the FEMA, the county."

Group members also spoke of the need for clarity in both short-term program objectives and longer-term plans through comments such as the following:

"...I think for the community, what would have helped would have been some very clear guidelines as to what was expected by the federal government of the community. You know, 'Hey community, this is not a flash in the pan. This is what we expect you to do. Not only with your seed money but what we expect your community to do in the long-run. This is our vision of what Project Impact is,' and that [is when] the community says [they] have a problem with this or [they] don't with this. They need a memorandum up front."

Another finding regarding program guidance that stood out as considerably different from 1998 was that the state took a very active role in guiding at least one community—something that the community appreciated very much:

“I have to say that our state police emergency management division is a partner with us and that has just been valuable to us. We wouldn’t be as far as we are today if we didn’t have them telling us, ‘Now, next you need to do this and this is how to do this.’ Because, you can go into this program and it’s like, ‘Okay, what physically do I need to do?’ And I think it needs to be spelled out, so to speak.”

## **2. Calls for a consistent FEMA representative**

In 1998, respondents voiced the concern that there did not appear to be a single person whom they could approach for information. They wanted, “one identified person at the regional or state level that the communities can talk to for continuity.” In 1999, as the lengthy quotes below illustrate, respondents still expressed a need for a FEMA connection who can supply clear and consistent information:

“As was just said, FEMA wants this to be your draft, your own, you forge your own path. And I think a lot of us, my state in particular, flounder because we did not have enough guidance...There were not enough guidelines. We would ask a question, and it’s not that it was anybody’s fault from the FEMA level or the state level, but nobody knew the answer to the questions that we were asking, because nobody had asked or broached that particular subject at the time. I do think there probably should have been more guidelines. Although they were trying to get it away from a typical government program. That was the how it was being sold to us, anyway—probably to most of you. I think I floundered a lot more because I did not know exactly what would be allowed, what would not be allowed, what type of projects. Because every time we heard that there were no guidelines, then somebody would say, ‘Well this is the type of project we want to do, mostly educational.’ It has got to be at least fifty percent. Then after we would present something, then it would be, ‘No, that is not eligible, outdoor warning systems are not eligible. Well, I guess they are.’ We went through this *push-me pull-you* throughout a lot of this first year. Now I think the next communities are going to have a lot better idea. They’ve got a lot more communities and experiences to look at, and they can see what others have done.”

“...I know we started and stopped I don’t know how many times, and the same thing: You ask a question and get an answer, and then two weeks later it’s a different answer. In all honesty, it’s still happening. It would be really beneficial to whoever it is, that FEMA representatives that are coming to your community would not tell you how to do it, but ‘Here are your options, here are your choices, here’s what other areas have been focusing on...’ You do need to have someone dedicated. You do need to have an organization. You do need to get these various partners in the community interested. And they have done a good job trying to tell you to do that. Trying to really pull together. Reading it out of their little booklet and actually getting it done can be two different things.”

## **Importance of the Community Context**

In 1999, focus group participants were very concerned with understanding how community dynamics affect program implementation and effectiveness. One reason for this concern may be that increased experience with PI has revealed various ways in which the broader community

climate—particularly the degree of economic and political support for program objectives—can affect program implementation. Three general themes that emerged in the focus group discussions centered on the importance of taking into account the local community context in which the program must operate. Those themes concerned the timing for community involvement and local program development, political and regional concerns, and FEMA's interaction with and demands on participating communities.

### **1. Timing for community involvement and local program development**

In 1998, when time was discussed in connection with Project Impact, those discussions tended to focus on the need to have more time in which to do projects. In contrast, when time was discussed by focus group participants in 1999, discussions involved the need to have more time in which to encourage community involvement. Group participants often expressed concern that community timetables for garnering local support can differ from those of FEMA and other agencies. One issue mentioned, for example, was that initial program requirements, such as the preparation of the Statement of Work (SOW) and other paper work requirements, do not allow sufficient time for community input:

“We ran into a little bit of a problem in the budgeting process for this grant because they make you say up front what it is you're going to do and how much money you're going to spend. We wanted our subcommittees to tell us what projects to do and how much money we have to spend on those things. So if there's more flexibility in the budgeting process, that would be helpful. If we could say we'll do some of these projects, we don't know which ones and how much we're going to spend but we'll, you know, obviously there's one here that you're giving us money to do so we'll tell you when we get to them. That would have helped us I think.”

As another respondent put it:

“I think if they were going to do it over again, or the communities were going to do it, if they had more time to sit down and really think how they wanted to approach that program based on their own situation. And then not be locked into any specifics, because mitigation in one community is not mitigation in another—just based upon the type of population you have and your business community and the entire make up of the community in general and what you have for hazards.”

Consistent with 1998 findings, in 1999, some of the community representatives still felt that their communities were being rushed by FEMA to initiate and carry out projects:

“I think that hit a lot of communities the same way, because FEMA was trying to get the program out and going right away, so everybody felt they were rushed. Ours was the same way. They came up with all kinds of projects and some of them were pretty good and some of them we wanted re-looked.

In addition, one respondent reported feeling pressured to show results because of Congressional concerns:

“Last year in December, I know that when we came on, man, it had gotten back to Congress. And they wanted a show and tell of what they put all this money out for. And that's the reason the budget was cut right in half. Because they couldn't do show and tell. And that [was when] Mr. James Lee Witt and the rest of FEMA [said], ‘Okay, we have got to set the guidelines and we have got to show something of what

people are doing.' And that is the reason why [documentation finally came up], because I'll guarantee we didn't get out of here good before [the region] was on our backs: 'Where is your Memorandum of Understanding? We want it as soon as possible.' We have got to get it, and they have been pushing for it ever since. That is part of the problem... They were in a hustle, they needed to start showing something to Congress of how this money was being spent. Last year, they knew they had to come up with something, and I know through [the region], we got pressured. There is no doubt about it. They wanted something, they wanted something on paper. What we were doing, what we were going to do, and this sort of thing. So that they could get back to Congress as quickly as possible."

Unique in 1999 was a feeling, expressed by some group participants, that FEMA representatives were pushing hard for an agenda regarding hazards that community residents themselves did not necessarily see as severe enough to warrant emphasis:

"I think, one of the things we got was that there were some biases in FEMA over certain types of hazards as opposed to others. And, for example, we had one person from FEMA really driving home about flooding. Well, we have only some minimal flooding issues and there is no problems with that but this person was like, you know, 'Flooding!' Nothing else existed. And, and that was one of the problems, was fighting the FEMA biases. We've gotten a lot of issues where we've said, 'Well, here's what we want to do.' And we have ten things on our memorandum and the first cut of it, they were all rejected, all ten of them. And this is after all these meetings and all the participation and all the decisions we had. And then we put our ten things, our ten top things we wanted to do and, every one of them was rejected. And we were like 'How did that happen?' Because FEMA had people who were involved in developing all this with us. But what happened is that the person who had the, the one person with the bias on flooding, well, we really didn't put flooding up at the top of the list. We wanted to focus on dealing with snow and snow removal. That was to us, obviously, the big, the biggest issue. And so I don't know if you all ran into that but we ran into dealing with their bias toward certain flooding and hurricane type issues. [Those issues] seemed to...predominate."

## **2. Political and regional concerns**

As in 1998, 1999 focus group participants spent a good deal of time discussing the political aspects of Project Impact initiation and implementation. Here, for example, two focus group members talked about the challenges of taking a regional and intergovernmental approach to PI:

"Going back to this city-county thing, the city got the grant, and they more or less left out the county. The city is half of the county, and we get along really well, but the second and most important project they brought out was the drain cleaning, the drain inspection and cleaning. Well, every drain that runs through the city is either a state or a county drain. So, we had to go through the politics before we could clean these drains. We had to get permission from the state to clean the state drains, and permission from the county to clean the county drains. Even though they run through the city and they impact us, they're not our drains. So, we are just now clearing up all this politics and getting permission to go and clean these drains. Had they given the money to county, that would have solved one level of the political aspect that we wouldn't have had to deal with."

“We’re not—we’re just the city, and we have a metropolitan area, and it’s very hard because at our city limits line we’re suppose to stop, and that’s ridiculous. I mean, a hazard or a disaster doesn’t stop because the city limit is there.”

### **The Role of the PI Coordinator**

In both 1998 and 1999, participants placed great emphasis on the necessity of having a PI coordinator or other full-time personnel to keep PI moving forward. Participants emphasized the importance of hiring a professional at the very start of the project:

“In our situation, we have a Project Impact manager that’s paid out of FEMA money, administrative fees...I think that’s good, to have some money in there for the communities that are having a hard time trying to find money to hire a professional person to run the program.”

Respondents across both years and all discussion groups echoed the importance of having full-time PI coordination. As one group member put it:

“The work involved in getting the initiative up and running, that it is a full time job and so to just add this to someone else’s duties doesn’t work out very well. And we struggled with that, passed the ball around to a couple different people trying to get the initiative up and going and finally wised up and hired a full time coordinator.”

### **Program Flexibility**

The need for program flexibility is another point that continues to receive emphasis. In 1998, for example, one respondent stressed that, “Project Impact needs to stay fluid, because even though some people are ready to do bricks and mortar, some people are not at that point yet.” In 1999, respondents still appreciated the need for program fluidity and viewed FEMA’s willingness to accommodate changes as both necessary and helpful.

“The one thing FEMA did, does really well I think, is they give us anyway absolute flexibility. Our contact person lets us do anything. Talk about, you know, it’s easier to get in piggy-backing in on an already existing [project] out there. Going into schools, we went to a group that already goes to every elementary kid in the valley. I called before I went and I said to our contact, ‘What if they want us to write them a check? They are non-profit. I’ve got to be prepared for anything,’ and he said, ‘Go for it. If you think it’s okay and it’s going to Project Impact goals such as they are, go for it.’ They’ve not said no to anything. So, that’s flexibility I think. Very, very nice.”

### **Mentoring and Networking**

Unique in 1999 was the appreciation respondents expressed about the mentoring they had received both from other communities and from FEMA. Clearly, being able to look outside their own communities for guidance is extremely important for program participants. Discussion group members observed, for example, that:

“The mentoring program really helped us out. Other communities that already started with Project Impact came and talked to us about what they have done.”

"[The region] actually had all of the communities get together...right after all the communities were announced. We actually sat down and had training and that was quite helpful. Although I didn't quite understand the impacts of everything until later on. It first of all steered me, I guess, but it did help prepare me for some things. I guess that is one thing that I think, I don't know if all regions have done that, but it was important for us. We met [in one community]...They are a fairly progressive community and they basically said, 'We'll set everything up, but we want to be able to help mentor.' Because mitigation-wise they were way ahead of everybody else, I think. They knew that their experiences could help others. It was quite helpful."

"You can call that next community and go 'What did you guys do? How did you get this done or what were you looking at?' And I'm sure that especially in some of the small rural communities they're not even thinking on a regional scale about water in ways, you know. 'We had a flood, but what do we do about it?' Nobody knows. They don't have engineering departments, they don't have planning departments. Those are the communities that definitely need the resources from the other Project Impact communities."

"It's crazy for us all, individually, to go out there and reinvent the wheel. A disaster is a disaster, whether it is snow, or a flood, or a hurricane. We need to deal with it, and we all have to jump through the same hoops to get our money in the end. So, it goes much faster when we work together than if everybody floundering, doing their own thing."

### **Specific Requests from Communities**

In both 1998 and 1999, focus group participants were asked to discuss what kinds of assistance FEMA could provide to their communities. In both years, group participants expressed a desire for help with publicity and marketing for the program:

"I would say some, you know, posters, publications, stickers, or anything that the federal government has got, make it available to this, you know, for the newcomers...Our stickers, they fade in the sun...We can't put them in for more than a week and then they're gone."

"I think the federal government, being that it works with the state, they should have the states do a publicity campaign on Project Impact for, you know, the state itself. There's enough money there to give the state plenty of cash to say, 'Okay, for the next month we want you to do first aid for Project Impact.'"

"I think that [what] I could see as being a problem is when Project Impact, when your community is active, there ought to be a standardized newspaper article that you can get into your papers, get on your news and then the biggest thing would be make a list of who [has] the grant, who's involved, the past, the present community."

"FEMA needs to look at what [they can] do to educate the entire public. What kind of mechanisms can they put in place on a national basis and have it work down, but to get that information out, to create kind-of educational programs or whatever that can then be borrowed and used at the local level. But when is the last time you saw an ad on a network TV program calling your attention to the importance of emergency preparedness?"

A new theme that emerged in 1999 was that communities want help in devising their own ways to evaluate PI on the local level. As two group participants put it:

"I think one of my things is I've been writing a plan for how we're going to exist and what we're going to accomplish over the next twenty years if we're still around...I'm looking for ways to evaluate our process, what we're doing. So many houses moved out of the flood plane, or, you know, that's real good but we don't have that right now so we're looking at how we gauge public awareness or public education. We're working with the Red Cross, with that [really] closely. But how do we evaluate our product and not success?"

"Well, I know it's very obvious when you have a successful program and things like that but we're looking, I am looking for things that, measuring it and putting it down on paper and saying, 'Mr. City Council, or Mrs. City Council, you know this, these are the numbers and this is how it's working.'"

## **PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES**

In both 1998 and 1999, the most commonly-mentioned problems with getting local programs started were associated in one way or another with money and time. However, there also appears to be a growing level of awareness in the communities regarding the complexity of other issues involved in launching and implementing PI. For example, although barriers involving funding and time remained in the forefront, communities seemed to show more sophistication and depth of understanding concerning these issues in 1999. For example, in the second year focus groups, simply obtaining raw resources was not as large a concern for participants as it had been in 1998. The problems and challenges discussed in 1999 centered more around such issues as politics, PI personnel, interagency communication and action, long-term funding concerns, and specific requests for action on the part of FEMA. Additionally, although problems generating and sustaining momentum were raised in 1998, the issue gained in importance in 1999. (Momentum-related problems are discussed in a different section of this report.)

### **Politics**

Focus group participants clearly recognize that political challenges are among the two or three largest challenges PI communities face. By the time the 1999 focus groups took place, interest and priorities for PI appeared to have gone beyond encouraging political participation to focus on the need to sustain interest at the top levels. PI personnel found that they need to spend a considerable amount of time and effort both engaging important political leaders and convincing them PI is important. As these group participants noted:

"The person who is hired to be the staff person has to spend a lot of that person's time trying to keep the other people engaged, especially the people at the higher policy levels...I'm a bureaucrat, you know, and I don't have the political clout to get things done. I can get things done from a mechanical point of view but when it comes time to move the world, it's political clout that is going to move the world."

"Well, for us I would say that absent what we refer to as the teachable moment, which is the earthquake that doesn't kill anybody or the flood that recedes quickly with minimal damage, it [Project Impact] has to be convincing people, in particular with leadership, that mitigation needs to be at the top of their list."

“Oh, problems? One I guess would be maintaining interest at the top levels, would be one.”

“They all had someone else telling them, ‘This is your highest priority and Project Impact is really low.’ I am the only one that it’s my highest priority, and I’ve also learned that I do everything myself.”

Once again, understanding the community and making use of community knowledge can help to head off potential political problems during the program’s initiation phase. Without that knowledge, Project Impact could fall prey to local political rivalries:

“The other part of that is me coming in from out of state to a new community not knowing the lay of the land. In every small community, there are skeletons buried there, bones buried. There are old feuds that go back to three to four generations that affect trying to get a community together. I mean, how do you put a panel together, the Hatfields and McCoys for crying out loud, when you have a shoot-out right in front of you, and this is [what] you’re up against because you don’t know what went on and if somebody doesn’t make you smart [you experience problems.] OK, fine, but now you’re going to undergo about two weeks of training just knowing who’s who in this community, who you can talk to about what, who’s done, just what you know because you’re out there in the community dealing with these people, and in some cases [making people angry], because you don’t where you’re coming from...I won’t mention names, but getting a certain business partner who is more than willing to come on line, jumped in there and did a great job, but he’s alienated a lot of communities, they don’t like him because his personality. Well, that causes problems, because if this person was a very popular individual in the community, I mean he’d be helping to recruit, bring other businesses in, he’d be part of the team, but in this case he’s not...So I’m having to work around this issue, to mend fences, to do a lot of politics, to get people to like each other again so they’ll work together, and these are the things you need to know.”

### **Problems with Time and Personnel**

In both 1998 and 1999, respondents expressed concern about the sheer amount of time that is needed to establish PI in the community:

“I don’t mind working twenty-four hours a day, but boy it gets old though. We’ve managed, but it goes back to having a person, a coordinator physically there for that specific purpose, and of course the community there to help. There’s no doubt about it [that] you need to have the personnel.”

“I was looking at this question. One thing I wrote down was time. I think that’s probably the biggest challenge that all of us our working on...in my community because it’s an extra job for us. It’s not that it’s a job that we don’t enjoy, it’s just that it’s an extra job.”

“Everything [is] going on all at once, [and] that’s our biggest problem.”

Another point made by 1999 focus group members is that PI not only requires significant amounts of time and effort, but it is also important that the ones making those time commitments are the right kinds of people. PI leaders not only need to have a lot of time to devote to the program; they also need be the kinds of workers and volunteers who are willing to take initiative,



even when that may involve taking some degree of risk. Those who commit time to Project Impact must also be good marketers. As group members put it (see comments below), they must be passionate about the program and capable of selling “ice cubes to Eskimos” and “the hair dryer to the bald man”:

“If you want people to spend the time on it who are otherwise busy, it’s got to be a passion with them. Last point, just something for them to think about. The police and fire [personnel] who are generally recognized as the saviors within the community: How do they view you and are they a significant partner in your effort? I don’t want to take on that.”

“People are, you know, you’ve got to dangle that carrot, or they’re not going to come to you...one of the sessions I sat in, they were talking about thinking outside the box, and boy, this is a program where you definitely need to think outside the box. Find yourself, find somebody who is a good salesman, that can sell ice cubes to Eskimos, and he will get your Project Impact running. And you have to start thinking like that guy. Sell the hair dryer to the bald man, and that’s one of the things, I mean, you can use little hooks. I personally probably would not write a permit in my town for going back and retro-fitting an existing structure or just simple strapping and anchoring and doing that. On the other hand, if I tell a guy, ‘I’ll waive the fee on this permit if you’ll do this,’ all of a sudden, he’ll come in and get the permit, and he’ll do the thing just because he thinks he’s saving himself money.”

Another issue that arose in 1999 was a problem with balancing Project Impact with other community priorities. So many activities compete for the time and attention of people who are involved with their communities that those individuals often find themselves having to pick and choose which activities to support:

“As I said, I work in a very small town. I don’t know how they call it a city, but they do. They’re very proud of that. It used to be a town. Everybody in that town is somehow aligned with various causes and historical...functions and activities. The Chamber of Commerce is constantly busy with tours and the museum there and all this sort of thing. I just keep hearing over and over and over, ‘Bad time of the year, Christmas is coming. Bad time of the year, tourist season is starting.’ I guess my point is and I’m sure this is as true in every other community, all these people who are involved in this initiative had full time jobs and they’re being paid to do them, and they sometimes have a little problem keeping [up] with PI.”

In 1998, there were many discussions about the need to have a designated PI coordinator, and in 1999 group participants reinforced the importance of having a committed and energetic coordinator. In 1999, however, one focus group participant recounted a situation in which having a PI coordinator had actually backfired, because it gave others the impression that they didn’t need to put as much effort into the program:

“Do you know what I found out? Only because somebody spoke up and told me. The same thing happened, six months everybody just kind of laid low. There wasn’t a lot said. They stopped coming to meetings. I found out that they thought for whatever reasons that when I came on board and that I was getting a salary to be the Project Impact coordinator that their role somehow just...[was] not necessary. That I was going to do everything that the committee, that the work group committee had been doing, and I essentially do a lot of that. I mean, I do all the press releases and things that we have other folks that should be doing it, but they really have taken

[that] attitude that since we have [had a PI coordinator], and this is a significant thing because...at FEMA there was a lot of discussion about the pros and cons of having [and] funding a full-time coordinator in a designated community. How would that affect the initiative? Would it take away from the folks in the community who may have taken more charge of the situation? And obviously it depends where the person came from, I came from outside the community.”

### **Interagency Communication and Action**

Comparing comments made by 1998 focus group participants with those made in 1999, there appears to have been an overall improvement with respect to interagency communication and action. For example, the 1999 groups spent less time discussing problems in these areas. Nevertheless, discussion group members still expressed concern about issues related to intergovernmental coordination, bureaucratic requirements, and accountability. The following are examples of comments made by 1999 group participants:

“My concern is walking the fine balance between bureaucracy and accountability, and I know we have to deal with both, but not just the different levels of bureaucracy from local, county, state, and federal, and the interagency thing as well...”

“The state and federal government need to get in there, be proactive, and advertise Project Impact, besides their website. It has to come from, you know, the national news. We said that a while ago. It’s got to be out there and if not, it’s us selling all the time, which can’t work.”

“The state doesn’t know what the region’s doing, and the region doesn’t know what headquarters is doing. Project Impact overall...they’re stealing resources from other areas to promote Project Impact.”

One issue that surfaced in 1999 involved confusion regarding communication and integration between federal partners and the local communities:

“One of the problems or concerns that we’ve seen in our situation there, federal bureaucracy, working with the Corps of Engineers. We do have a good working relationship with them, but they have delayed some of the things we’ve wanted to do, like flood levee walls and so forth...We’re trying to keep the communication doors open and stuff. If we could have them work with the communities, [if it would] be a little closer and be a little more understanding, we [could] get maybe more work done.”

“I think the other thing is, on the federal [level], agency integration [is] so critical. We were so frustrated in repairing a river after a flood. The only thing we could get was to bring it back to what [it] was, and the community did not understand why [we] weren’t making it better, and we told them we can’t. If you improve, then you pay for it, and so it’d be great if you could take these types of dollars and integrate them with the mitigation dollars, a different question, to leverage those dollars against each other. But that federal agency integration, some of the goals and missions of the various agencies start to actually make sense together, versus having to do them all independently, where at time they are at cross-purposes.”

One participant talked at length about both positive and negative aspects of the intergovernmental system in which Project Impact operates and about the mixed messages communities often receive:

“Well, what expectations does FEMA have? FEMA are plural. FEMA are lots of people and lots of ideas and it’s quite remarkable that this program exists. It’s an amazing thing to me that this is a program that exists right now. It’s experimental and it’s quite messy...but I must say that, well, two things. One is we have received wonderful help from FEMA, and that’s local, and that’s national. It’s quite remarkable how caring they have been to us, nurturing. I think, overall, the communication has been cooler maybe than my hearing. Sometimes I think that the problem wasn’t in what they were saying, but the way I was hearing it. But, the second thing is, I feel very strongly, is that there are two phases of the moon, or there’s the right brain and the left brain. ‘There are no rules with what we want to do, and we’re here to help you.’ And then there’s the actuaries, and then the auditors...I said, ‘Okay guys, here’s the deal. The rule is there are no rules, but we will be audited and I don’t know what standards are out there for us and I would like to know.’ I think that sort of pull and tug has been pretty big, and there’s no schedule, there’s no rule, take your time, build your team. So, I’m just sort of sailing along, you know, and it’s building a team, having a good time, and then all of a sudden there’s an application, it’s 25/75 and all of the things they told me that we were going to do with this grant are not eligible because they’re only 25%. And all the stuff they told me not to do...and a lot of the ‘Nos also came from our state, as I look back on it. But the stuff they told me not to do with this grant is the stuff all of a sudden I have to grab this committee and say, ‘Guys, we’re not doing it that way.’ Besides, it has to be done by November 6. I was thinking we would have a long goal and about March we’d get into projects. So we haven’t recovered from it yet. The portion of our group who worked on the application was very focused and very precise, and they will say to you, ‘We had a plan and here it is.’ And it is very precise. The group that didn’t work on that didn’t buy into it. So, anyway, so there’s a half of FEMA that says one thing, and then the other side. The father and mother fighting, or something. Then, the folks at the region were saying, ‘Ignore that. It’s not real. There’s really not a deadline. Just take your time. And besides that, don’t worry about the 25/75.’”

### **Long-term Funding Concerns**

A serious concern in both 1998 and 1999 was the problem of finding long-term funding sources for PI:

“One issue is the ongoing funding issue. Once the initial money runs out, I think that’s going to be a challenge for everybody. What do you do when the initial funds are gone.”

“I think it’s funding, just like everybody. It’s funding, and time, and staff. We have all these thousands of ideas, wonderful things to do and part of it has me [is] frustrated because I’ve taken on the funding. How are we going to sustain ourselves. I’m looking at private funding, and grants, and foundations, and there’s a zillion ways out there to find money but then [to] have the time to look for [the money] because you’re too busy doing a program.”

### **Need for Specific Activities**

In 1999, respondents expressed a need for strategies that can keep private partners who initially signed on active in the program. They also stressed the importance of having realistic expectations for PI, as these observations indicate:

“And the other problem is that we are not able to tell our partners what we would like them to work with us on. What is it we want them to do? We ask them to sign a piece of paper to be a partner and we can’t. . . We’re not at the point yet where we can ask them anything or tell them what it is that we would like them to participate in.”

“I mean, when I started out with these forums that we were putting on ourselves this fall, I was thinking if I don’t have one hundred twenty-five people, boy, I’m just not getting any turnout. You know, all of sudden in my mind, whether there’s fifty, I’m thinking ‘all this is horrible,’ and then, by the end of the period, I’m going ‘fifty, this is great!’ There was even better interchange, but, you know, we have to have realistic expectations.”

### **Other Problems and Challenges**

In 1999, more than in 1998, participants discussed public apathy as a barrier standing in the way of program implementation. One way to combat this apathy was suggested by this community representative:

“My twist on it is information. I feel when people are receiving information at the time their house is destroyed or the time when having to do something, [that is] maybe not the best time and there are other quiet times when people could be a lot more receptive to the mitigation message. I feel that personalized information [that] is really focused on an individual property or a neighborhood to go a long way for motivated people to get involved at the personal level.”

### **MOVING FROM EDUCATION TO MITIGATION**

In this study, DRC was interested in learning more about strategies community representatives believed would be effective in shifting the emphasis in Project Impact from public awareness and public education to actual structural and nonstructural mitigation projects. While acknowledging the importance of this goal, group members also emphasized that public awareness and education must remain priorities for PI, because there is much that community residents still do not understand about the mitigation process and why it is so important. Perhaps for this reason, many of the most visible activities in the PI communities in 1999 remained education-related.

When they were asked how to move the program more decisively in the direction of concrete mitigation measures, group participants gave answers that centered around the following themes: 1) that education and mitigation are mutually reinforcing and interdependent; 2) that it should be emphasized that mitigation, rather than education, is the ultimate goal of the program; 3) that more funding is necessary; 4) that at the same time there is an ongoing need to emphasize education in order to change cultural mind-sets; and 5) that if PI is a program that builds upon community strengths and that encourages partnering, then it should also be recognized that education may well be the strongest programmatic component for some communities.

### **Education and Mitigation are Interrelated**

Focus group participants understood the need to get concrete mitigation projects under way. However, as we have seen in other sections of this report, timing always plays an important role in what can be attempted and accomplished in PI communities. The majority of the communities are in the risk assessment/planning stage, and respondents believe that education is necessary to help push those plans into action. They also believe that education remains necessary in order to set the

stage for long-term mitigation projects. Without public education and awareness programs that impress upon the public the need for loss reduction, mitigation programs will lack the support they need. As these group participants noted:

"It falls back on the responsibility of the community. Most progressive communities do long-range planning for community improvements and growth, so once you get the education they're talking about—awareness, public awareness, and education—once that becomes incorporated into the educational system and the way of life in the community, it makes it easier to get those plans enforced, put into action by a ten year plan, twenty year plan, and that's really what it's about. Somebody else mentioned earlier that it's a long-range program. That's exactly what it is."

"I came to this meeting with the opinion that Project Impact has a three-year planning cycle before you do mitigation. That there's a whole piece here [that] we're missing, and we're trying to do a kind of a Project Impact without federal funding, with the communities that we're working with. We're helping communities who can't fight, campaign, or [have brought] a community together before, and if they never get funding, still to be able to do mitigation. We just start with political wheels number one, number two, the three year planning and work cycle, education cycle, and then point three is basic technical assistance for me doing codes and issues, engineering wise, in the local area."

### **Education as a Means, Not an End in Itself**

As the quotes immediately above suggest, group participants see education as an important tool that can be used to achieve mitigation. At the same time, it is necessary to stress that mitigation, rather than education, remains the ultimate goal of PI, and that education needs to be seen as a means to that end. Suggestions from focus group members included the need to approach people at the right time, stating with clarity that education is not the primary goal, and to assign partners to projects other than educational ones:

"So, we are already working on a project with FEMA, with one point some million dollars. The committee already bought into it, so what we are hoping [for] also is to use Project Impact in not only educating the public and having a type of awareness, but to develop the long-range plans to eliminate development in vulnerable lands or flood-prone areas. This one thing we cannot do with one little project. This particular plan, we call it an action plan, we're going to develop the long-range plan and add this part into it, so basically the community could have a guide to go to in the future."

"I think that what we really emphasized when we started up, and maybe it was because I was on the chair, I don't know, is that FEMA was talking to us about, 'Oh well, this community is doing education, and, this other community spent half a million dollars on flyers to send out and everything,' and I think education has to be a piece of it, but I think the thing is having to do those actual, physical things. That's what has to be stressed, and part of our goal, some of our long-range projects are changing some of the community rules. Getting that as part of the community planning, changing what is allowed and changing where you can build houses."

"...And we actually, now we've just funded a project, partially funded a project, for some more flood control. It's funding of a project to study what has to be done and that has been...used. But I don't think education is, it should be de-emphasized, I

think that's part of the thing at least. FEMA is talking about education and everything, and I think that's a piece of it, but it can't be the primary goal."

"Education or awareness is great, but I think...we have to materialize the goals. In other words, we have to accomplish structures and become noticeable...Ultimately, I think James Lee Witt wouldn't want us to go back to the President and say this is what we've accomplished...If we don't have a dam to show or a drainage field or something that has materialistic goals ahead of them...I think Project Impact loses [credibility]. I think the federal government has got to look at the new partners coming on board. They've got to be sure that they are committed to creating a disaster resistant community, not just giving a little education to the general public. Again, education is fine, but there needs to be something firmer at the other end. I think you've got to pick doable projects. They don't need to be exceptionally big."

## **Funding**

Not surprisingly, funding was seen as essential for moving forward toward mitigation goals. For example, focus group participants identified taxes, the waiving of permit fees, and other monetary incentives ways of promoting mitigation activities:

"We're working with the school system now, and they passed the bond issue, but we came to the table after the budgets were set for the bond issue, and they say 'Oh gee guys, we really want to play with you all, we want to make this stuff, we want to put stuff in our school, but we don't have the money.' You know, it's again, the money and we're looking at the private sector, donations..."

"I think there probably are grants available for the actual physical structural stuff. Whether it be anchoring, now I can't tell you where to go, I think that's [this person's] specialty, and to find that money. The strapping, some local incentives you can do if you don't have building codes, you can start to try to get your community to adopt them. If you don't have planning codes, or storm-water retention, on-site plan development, or things like that, try and get the community to adopt them. You're going to have to make a really good argument to convince people they need this when they don't think they do. On a one-step level, if you already are in a permit environment, what you can do is convince the council or city manager, or mayor or whatever form of government you may have there, that if I would normally issue a permit for this person to come in and do all this extra anchoring and strapping that water heater and tying down rafters, waive the fee, you know, give them an incentive to make it happen."

## **Changing Local Cultures through Education**

A strong feeling expressed in the focus groups was that for PI to succeed, community cultural issues need to be addressed. Education was once again seen as a crucial tool that can be used not only for publicizing specific projects, but also for changing cultural assumptions and practices with respect to loss reduction. Since education plays such an important role in changing existing mind-sets, it is seen as something that warrants continued emphasis. Group participants saw educational initiatives as key to obtaining support for and maintaining the momentum of mitigation projects:

"I'm wondering if we and FEMA didn't underestimate the amount of work that was going to need to be done ahead of this mitigation package, and maybe this is a

reflection on how we have not done a good job of doing education, but I think we hurried to get the grant applications in, we got the award, we had to write the MOU, and then we're supposed to be off and mitigating. And the reality is that there is a lot of education that has to happen, and even before that there's the hazard analysis, and if you haven't done that, you need to collect the facts, make the case, present the case—and that's whether it's to the individual citizen or the building department to get them involved. But it's almost like there needs to be a pre-grant grant that says, 'Okay you're going to go ahead and do the basic stuff, and then you're going to do this mitigation.' The bottom line is, we really want to get to the nuts and bolts and the sticks and tools kinds of things, but I really think all of us underestimated how much we needed to do."

"Public education and awareness can't be looked upon as a one-shot deal. It has to be looked on as a sustained effort, and it shouldn't be down-played as like, 'Well, I only do public education. I don't do mitigation projects.' It's like, wait a minute, hold it, you'll never get to the other without the first one, and that has to be sustained when the time is right, and the money is there, and all of these other things collect around a specific identified mitigation project that has consensus, or at least the politicians that control the money for it agree. I'm assuming it's a public thing. You move forward on that and the politicians, if you have been doing your public education, they should be able to use that as the cover. This makes sense to do and that will help their efforts. If the public has been educated to that, it will be better."

"My point being, ask these folks: 'Do you ever leave the educational need?'"

Group response: "No, you can't."

### **Education as a Means of Strengthening Partnerships**

PI seems to work best in communities that have identified and work from their strengths. And in some cases the strength of a community is directly tied to what it has done in the area of education. Moreover, education can be an important vehicle for getting partners involved in the PI process—and getting them to contribute money and other resources. Equally important, it keeps participants engaged while longer-term mitigation projects are being developed. As one focus group participants put it:

"Probably the most active committee we have is the education committee. We did not focus our dollars on that. We're trying to fund that with our local grocery stores or banks or services clubs. These are small dollar things, budget. We are getting the banks, the grocery stores, insurance companies, whomever, to fund the different things... So far, the community, has probably spent in the neighborhood of \$1000, and the rest of it has been our local businesses, that have funded these things: brochures for the severe weather for the summer; winter weather tips; things like that. But going to the structural side of things and getting those things done. I have felt a lot of pressure from FEMA that we're not getting moved into that direction, that we're spending too much time on the other stuff. These things take time: the planning; the environmental processes. We had most of our money tied down to this physical diking of our water treatment plant. Maybe our MOU is not focused on the structural things, maybe a lot of us have focused too much on education, but it takes time. We're talking in excess of a year to do the engineering, the planning, and just the process to go through, and hopefully we're given a little more time to get those things done, I guess."

In short, educational and outreach are ongoing needs because, if carried out effectively, education helps provide the rationale for other PI activities, mobilizes support for mitigation, attracts partners, and provides ways in which people can become involved in PI while long-term mitigation strategies are being developed. While group participants understand that educational activities are no substitute for actual structural and nonstructural projects, they also believe that education and mitigation are closely linked.

### **FUTURE DIRECTIONS: WHAT FEMA CAN DO TO HELP LOCAL PROGRAMS SUCCEED**

The bulk of this report has focused on program successes and on the challenges local communities face as they attempt to initiate and implement PI projects. This section discusses several types of assistance and guidance focus group members believe FEMA should provide in order to improve the effectiveness of local PI programs. Eleven different ways that FEMA can help local communities were identified. These suggestions ranged from helping communities identify additional funding sources and providing various forms of guidance and technical assistance to building networks and improving intergovernmental communication and coordination. The brief discussions and interview excerpts below summarize those needs, as seen by group participants.

#### **1. FEMA should help communities locate alternative funding sources**

Communities want assistance in identifying funding sources to leverage against the seed money that has already been provided. Participants believe that their communities have set ambitious goals regarding what they want to accomplish, but also acknowledge that they have difficulty finding needed support to follow through. Even if FEMA does not provide additional financial assistance, the agency can help communities locate and tap into other funding sources. This group participant suggested that:

“One thing I think maybe FEMA could look at is its initial grant before it’s accepted. The local communities would have it determine future funding services, or have a match, or have to be something that would be incorporated with that. I think we’ve all faced the same problem. We get this push, and we start these big things, and we all look kind of foolish about the fact we fall on our faces because we can’t support it...so I would like to see that incorporated with the initial project.”

#### **2. FEMA should explain and clarify the role of national partners**

Some group participants suggested that FEMA needs to be more effective in clarifying the role of national partners to communities, and also in ensuring that information about Project Impact is transferred from national partners’ headquarters to their regional and local branches. Local participants often see little communication taking place between the national level and affiliated businesses in their communities. For example, one group member observed that:

“You can sit in Washington, D.C. and negotiate a national level partnership with all the people you want to, including the heads of any and all federal agencies. That does not mean that the word is going to flow downhill to the regional administrators or to the person you’re going to call on the phone.”



**3. FEMA should provide guidance to local communities, but should not try to micromanage programs**

Local communities want FEMA to provide Project Impact templates, give guidance, and clearly outline what will be expected of them in the future. At the same time, they also want FEMA to allow them to make their own decisions and proceed with projects they themselves determine are appropriate. Among the things these group members would like to see are the following:

“FEMA should say, ‘OK, you have your plans. Are you organized? Do you know what your next step is? We will be there for you.’ If the community could show that they know what they’re wanting to do in the short-run and long-run, [FEMA should] let that community take care of the problem. Don’t tie their hands. That’s very, very much needed right now, ‘cause most communities understand their problems, their situation. Let them handle that. I think that’s very important.”

“Part of this goes back to, you know, don’t promise what you can’t deliver, deliver what you promise. I think FEMA, through Project Impact, has promised us a program basically with no strings attached, and that this is something that we are going to forge ahead with our own ideas. But we have had a lot of road blocks and stumbling blocks along the way saying that, ‘This is not mitigation.’ You know, every community has their own ideas about what mitigation is...I think that message has to go back to FEMA that we don’t want to have a lot of strings attached if we are going to be able to allow committees to determine [their own projects] and then all of a sudden all those ideas have to get thrown out. [That should not happen.] You have brought it to the public, what do you want done and then all of their ideas are kicked out. I think that is a bad message that we’re trying to send back to all of our communities: ‘We want your involvement but none of your projects can be funded through FEMA.’”

**4. FEMA needs to provide more national-level publicity for the program**

Group members emphasized that FEMA needs to continue to develop innovative ways of promoting Project Impact throughout the country, and also of helping smaller communities with local advertising. They observed that as a federal agency, FEMA can frequently garner more media attention than local representatives and officials. As these individuals noted:

“Well, I just [was] noticed that FEMA had done some info-mercials...on different disasters and I was just wondering if they could do something more specific to, say, our region. I know they’ve got some media people that do an excellent job, and maybe between disasters they might go into a region and create some more info-mercials tailored to that area, that community.”

“I think we’d like to see FEMA do both national and local advertising, because it seems like so much of our time right now has been going into actually letting people know what the project is. People don’t have a clue of what Project Impact is. And that takes up a lot of our time, I think, to go out as kind of a first visit into businesses and say, ‘Here is some information about the project, would you mind reading it over.’ A lot of time people are not going to have the time to read over things.”

“The signing ceremony was important for publicity. Very important for publicity. I think it was important because people got face time that [they] wouldn’t have [had otherwise], and that also brought the higher levels in the state to our community and

that, they like that, so yes, the answer is yes, I think it was important...The reason I say it was important is because our local newspaper just kind of ignored us entirely until we had the signing ceremony, and all of a sudden they were interested."

**5. FEMA should continue providing technical assistance**

Local communities greatly appreciate the technical assistance FEMA provides, and they believe that assistance should continue. Additional HAZUS training was among the kinds of technical assistance group participants thought would be useful. As this group member observed:

"I think it would be very helpful if, for me, if FEMA would sort of stop the development of the science side of hazards and begin pushing the development of user-training-utility, just to make it very simple to work with, get stuff into and out of, as opposed to deeper science at this point. I really believe pretty strongly HAZUS has a potential to helping a lot of Project Impact communities personalize their results, get their message out, and get community support. I think it [would] be a good feedback, a good return on FEMA's effort: to make HAZUS just more user [friendly], add utility functions to it."

**6. FEMA should promote realistic plans and goals**

Group members also stressed that FEMA should have realistic expectations for communities and also encourage communities to be more realistic about what they themselves can achieve over a given span of time. Both FEMA and PI communities should recognize that real change and real mitigation take time, and that the process cannot be rushed or forced. These individuals, both of whom used a farming analogy, argued that people often need assistance in order to farm well, but even with that help things still need time to grow:

"You know, the other thing would be realistic expectations...I'm going to use an analogy here of gardening, because FEMA says that this is seed money, and I think that if you want to expect for someone to begin farming, that you not only have to provide them with quality seeds, but you also have to let them do all of the work that it takes to prepare and gear up, and then plant and tend and carry forth, and that means that we need the planning time. We probably, some of the smaller communities, need the planning assistance. We need to think long-term, so when they say, you know, You've got a few months to spend this money on mitigation so let's cut to the chase and let's hurry up and rush your plan...which if you don't till the soil and you don't fertilize...you're not going to have anything."

"I like that analogy of it being seed money, and let's look at it as a real planting situation. The results aren't going to be overnight...Those seeds have to germinate, and once they germinate, then they're seedlings, and once they're seedlings, you have to throw some water and fertilizer on them so they can become mature plants, and then after that, they have to pollinate, and then from that the fruit grows. One of the best things I've heard is the five year plan, making it a little bit longer from what it is right now."

**7. FEMA should not determine spending timelines for communities**

Along these same lines, while group participants did acknowledge that some of their local leaders were taking too long to make decision regarding how to spend Project Impact money, timelines for spending money should be determined by local communities, rather than by FEMA.

Some saw a contradiction between messages indicating that funds should be expended quickly and other messages urging communities to approach mitigation systematically:

“‘And we want you to spend it on mitigation.’ Well the reality is that a piece of making something sustainable is having the planning, the hazard analysis, the facts to deal with, and then, the public education...I’m including our peers. So there’s a couple things that kind of fly in the face of what they’re saying. One is ‘Here’s the money hurry up, get it spent, but we want you to make this last.’ But we’re not doing the stuff that we need to do to make it last.”

Similarly, group members argued that the timing of events and activities should be determined by participating communities, and that local timelines should supercede FEMA’s deadline pressures.

“When you deal with FEMA, if you are asking them for assistance, it gets there. It takes time to get there, but it eventually gets there, but it takes a long time. But I think their requests were unreasonable, as far as having something decided and written. To make some requests was a very short [time]...and then they came to us and said, ‘Okay, now you’ve got to give us some dates in order to have your signing ceremony.’ And they were pushing [us to get it] done early and before spring, and we sent them dates, and they said ‘Oh no, those [dates] are no good. We might be able to come in June or July.’ And all the dates that were good for us, weren’t good for them, and we had to come up with a date that was going to be satisfactory for FEMA to be able to be hear, to come, and have their photo opportunities with the press to do it. So that was frustrating.”

#### **8. FEMA should continue to support increased regional involvement and networks**

Participants found regional Project Impact meetings particularly helpful in terms of training, networking, and guidance (again, guidance, as opposed to oversight). According to focus group members, FEMA should continue to encourage regional offices to provide such meetings.

“Oh, one thing I failed to mention...in our region, our director held the mentoring retreat for [the region’s]...Project Impact communities, and some of the stuff that we discussed here, we had already discussed then, so it doesn’t hurt to maybe talk to your region, you know, and say, ‘Hey, mentoring retreats have been going on in communities that are with Project Impact [and they were good].’”

“I would like to see quarterly meetings with the regional people, or in a division, or even break it down to, for instance, four groups rather than the whole region, or something like that. Something [where] there would be an evaluation...An evaluation, just like you do with an employee, sit down with an annual evaluation, something like that. So you know if you’re on track. Then that gives you a chance to network, and I think that was something that was mentioned here.”

“You’ve got all these different regional agencies, offices, and so on. Whether they could try and bring a team together and sit down with you and try to work through things rather than, again, everybody trying to re-invent the wheel...Why not be able to sit down with the people from the different agencies that have the resources and try to figure out what you can do collectively and solve some problems.”

9. **FEMA should assist with the development of broader interactive networks among PI communities**

Since the focus group participants were all attendees at the Mitigation Summit, they were of course aware that FEMA is trying to stimulate contacts and information exchange among PI communities. However, group members believe that FEMA could be doing more throughout the year to help establish and sustain PI community networks. They argued, for example, that the Internet should be used as a networking tool, and that overall, more should be done to facilitate communication among participating communities:

"FEMA needs to set up two different things. They need to set up an electronic bulletin board, and they can make you have a registration number to get into, to post your projects on under various categories, so that you can not only go to it for ideas, but you can also go to it to see if the wheel has already been invented. You know, somebody very easily, within all the staff at FEMA, someone could very easily categorize a bulletin board that you could post under the various categories what you're doing with your contact information."

"I'm just saying, go in there and do it. So you just post one day, 'Can anybody give me an idea about storm-water management?' Well, somebody going through it should have been able to fire off and just say, 'Contact so and so.' That's it, and it took you a few seconds and boy, that was fine. And I don't know anybody else who should be doing that but FEMA."

"One of the ideas here, though, is that if FEMA on their web page [said], 'If you want to link your Project Impact community, here is who you contact.' Then, as each community develops a web page, if you want to be linked to that, then you can solicit. You can go out on the Internet, that kind of message is out there all the time. 'If your business wants to link to my [community's page], hey, send me an e-mail and we will get together and do it.' If FEMA can promote that. So then they don't own everybody's web page, but certainly that link is available."

"Because of our agreement, MOU, with FEMA, we will probably put up a Project Impact site to allow people to exchange information and accumulate it, as part of our commitment. I don't think you're going to find FEMA able to do it, because they'll want to do it in a fashion that is so structured. By the time they get it through their bureaucracy, it will be a nightmare."

"I remember back twenty or thirty years ago to a model I saw that worked...Under the federal Model Cities program, HUD took the lead and essentially coerced various federal agencies to actively participate in the Model Cities program. You know, they came to our town, and we sat down, and we identified problems and what we needed to do to solve them, and so on. But what they did was, they dragged you to the meeting, you know, the people from the Department of Labor, the people from the Corps of Engineers, and so on, and we sat there collectively and came up with something, and those other people had to pony up their resources to help towards it. Now, once somebody took a gun away from their head after a few years, they kind of drifted away, but at least while the gun was there, that agency, that federal agency played an important hands-on role in bringing, seeing that the other resources came to the table, and I'm just wondering if FEMA...couldn't play some sort-of role here, in terms of bringing some clout, to bring some people together."

#### **10. FEMA should make efforts to improve its own intra-agency communication**

The 1999 focus group participants stressed the idea that FEMA needs to improve its own communication system within the organization, because communities are often hearing several different messages or not receiving adequate notice about events and requirements. For example, with respect to the Mitigation Summit that focus group members were attending at the time they took part in group discussions, one participant made the observation that:

“[FEMA will] say, ‘What are you going to give at the presentation?’ ‘What presentation? How long am I speaking? Who is my audience? Who else is presenting?’ ‘We don’t know.’ The presentation we’re giving [at this Summit] that we started getting ready for, then I get a letter that says that it’s a panel discussion. Whoa, back-peddle, you know, what, who else is presenting? It took me three weeks to find out. I went around FEMA and found the person and he, we’re talking now to find out from here. When we get here, they said we’re speaking to eighty people. [Now] we’re going to be in one of these little rooms. It’s going to be twenty-five people.”

#### **11. Communities need assurances regarding long-term federal support of PI**

Finally, group participants expressed strong concern about whether or not FEMA and the federal government will provide funding, guidance, political support, and technical assistance for Project Impact in the future. Some communities wonder if it is worthwhile to invest time and resources into the initiative if FEMA cannot assure long-term commitment to mitigation and Project Impact in general. Group members know that FEMA cannot guarantee future support at this time. However, they also stress that providing funding for a long-term program--as opposed to a “project”--is the best way of achieving PI’s goals, and they look to Congress for that support:

“If Congress could recognize Project Impact as a [permanent] program instead of a project, it would automatically take care of the funding issue long-term. Maybe it wouldn’t be just a flash in a pan, it might have some long-term life.”

### **CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS**

A number of general themes emerged during the focus group discussions. Local programs are pursuing multiple objectives, including public education, a wide range of different mitigation projects, partnership development, and various planning activities. Group participants expressed concern about maintaining PI’s momentum and suggested a number of strategies for accomplishing that aim, including increasing the overall funding base for the program, increasing staff size and encouraging higher levels of staff involvement at the local level, obtaining even stronger commitments for support from FEMA, taking steps to keep the private sector involved, providing incentives of various types, and searching for long-term funding for local projects.

Local program participants are beginning to have a deeper understanding of PI’s goals, but they would still like FEMA to provide clearer and more consistent program guidance. At the same time, they stress the need for local initiative and ownership of the program, arguing that ideas for mitigation projects must originate at the community level, and that those projects must follow timelines that communities consider reasonable. Those involved with local-level programs seem to be searching for the right balance between the need for local control, accompanied by the freedom to innovate and maintain flexibility, and the need for federal program assistance and overall accountability.

Discussion group members also expressed a degree of impatience with the slow pace of progress in their communities, pointing to the need to overcome what they characterize as local government's inherent conservatism and reluctance to make decisions and commit funds. Many see local governmental officials as overly cautious about taking steps toward mitigation. However, they also noted that uncertainties in federal decision-making processes and funding schedules can also hamper local efforts. Again, with respect to program progress, there is a concern with balance. Those involved with PI very much want to see programs progress more rapidly, but at the same time, they know that in order to be effective in the long run, projects must be selected, planned, and carried out judiciously and responsibly.

Like any program, Project Impact is subject to a wide range of political influences and constraints. Indeed, PI may be more politically vulnerable than many other governmental and social programs, because of the general lack of public concern about hazards and because prior to PI, most communities lacked organized constituencies that could work to put hazards on the public agenda. Indeed, one of the largest challenges PI faces is to overcome the political forces that have sustained the status quo. Group participants were very aware of the ways in which politics shapes both what is attempted and what can be accomplished in Project Impact communities. Those involved with PI report spending a good deal of time trying to engage political leaders and convince them that PI is something deserving of their support.

While the involvement of political influentials is crucial for program success, active public support is also critical. Group participants had a number of suggestions about ways of keeping the public involved in Project Impact. Clearly, disaster events and threats provide "teachable moments" for the public. Group members stress that information should be provided in language the public is able to understand, even if that means eliminating use of terms such as mitigation. Media partnerships and outreach to grass-roots community groups were also seen as good strategies for broadening community awareness and involvement. According to focus group members, local programs that undertake a variety of different activities have a better chance of drawing in multiple stakeholders than single-focused programs. They suggest that, paralleling the risk and vulnerability assessments they are already carrying out as part of PI, communities should also conduct resource and capacity assessments as a way of identifying potential partners.

The development of partnerships is a key element of the Project Impact initiative. Focus group participants discussed a wide variety of partnering relationships that are being developed and strengthened. Group members acknowledged the importance of private-sector partnerships, and they suggested a number of approaches that can be taken to create "win-win" relationships between PI and its partners. For example, care should be taken to ensure that involvement in PI generates positive publicity for participating businesses. Group members also recognize the importance of governmental, university, and both public and private-sector national-level partnerships. Communities are beginning to develop multi-community regional partnerships, and they are asking for mechanisms (such as Internet-based communications) that would enable PI communities around the country to communicate more easily with one another. However, they also expressed concern about "disconnects" in the flow of information between national-level partners and federal agencies and their local-level counterparts, questioning whether many of those who ostensibly have partnership agreements with PI have an adequate understanding of their roles.

Getting started with Project Impact was a challenge for many communities. To facilitate initial program development and implementation, group participants point to the need for greater clarity regarding program guidelines and greater flexibility in establishing program goals and timelines. Overall, those taking part in the focus group discussions expressed a need for clear and consistent guidance from FEMA during the program start-up process. Group participants spoke of various kinds of assistance FEMA can provide to communities, such as help with identifying alternative sources of

funding, doing more to link national partners to local efforts, giving greater national and local publicity to PI, providing more technical assistance, and continuing to support the development of information and support networks among communities participating in PI. While communities clearly recognize the importance of the resources and assistance FEMA provides, it is equally clear that they will resist any actions they define as attempts to micromanage local programs.

FEMA is currently placing a considerable amount of emphasis on the need to move PI beyond public awareness and education activities, so that the program can begin to actively address the need for structural and non-structural mitigation projects. Group participants agree on this need, and they too would like to see more progress on loss-reduction activities. However, they view public education as a continuous process, not as a set of activities that should be completed before communities move on to actual mitigation projects. For them, community educational programs are required not only to increase the public's knowledge regarding hazards, but also to enhance residents' own willingness to adopt mitigation and preparedness measures, and equally important, to mobilize public support for community-wide mitigation initiatives. Thus, although education must not be seen as an end in itself, it remains an important means for achieving the broader goal of community disaster resistance.

PI is attempting to bring about fundamental changes in both individual and larger cultural assumptions regarding risk, and it is impossible to think about bringing about those kinds of changes without informing and educating the public. At the same time, while they acknowledge the importance of educational initiatives, discussion group members recognize that education is not mitigation. That is, they understand that, unless accompanied by appropriate action, heightened public awareness will do nothing to reduce vulnerability. They also recognize that to make progress toward meaningful loss reduction, substantial efforts are needed to analyze hazards and vulnerability, establish mitigation priorities, identify mitigation projects that are feasible, and plan and carry out those projects. And they are aware that to complete these activities successfully, they must overcome public apathy and political opposition, keep stakeholders focused on program goals, and continue to find funding and other resources to sustain mitigation. Finally, group members also believe strongly that pursuing these objectives would be much less difficult if the federal government would elect to provide more substantial long-term funding for PI.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Letter: Year 1**

December X, 1998

NAME  
ADDRESS  
ADDRESS  
ADDRESS

Dear Mr/s NAME:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Project Impact focus group that is being conducted by the University of Delaware's Disaster Research Center

As was explained in our earlier telephone call, a focus group is a research technique that uses a group interview to obtain in-depth information on a particular topic. The purpose of the focus group interview you will be participating in is to learn from your personal and your community's experiences with Project Impact in order to assist new communities that will be included in this initiative in the future. Your insights and suggestions will be used to provide FEMA with recommendations about how Project Impact can be changed and strengthened to meet its overall objective of lessening disaster losses nationally by making communities more disaster resistant.

You will be part of a group of seven to ten people from other Project Impact communities. You have been selected to represent people who hold similar positions as yours—for example, as an elected official, a planner, an emergency manager, a business person—in other cities, counties, and regions. In order to assist you in planning for the focus group interview, we are including the list of questions that we will be discussing. Please feel free to discuss these questions with others in your community before you come to the focus group; but remember that we will be interested in **your** personal observations and experiences as well. One of the "rules" of a focus group interview is that everyone is given an equal opportunity to speak because it is recognized that, even if people have difference types and amounts of previous experience, all observations are equally valuable in order to provide insights on Project Impact and its future directions.

We will be tape recording the discussion in your focus group so that we can keep a careful record of the things that we hear from you and the others. However, in order for FEMA to get candid observations about Project Impact experiences and insights from involved communities, we guarantee the confidentiality of your comments—any recommendations that come out of the interviews will not be attributed to specific communities or persons. FEMA recognized the importance of this need by requesting that this assessment of Project Impact experiences be conducted by an independent research unit.

Once again, your focus group will meet on December 8<sup>th</sup>, the day before FEMA's Project Impact Summit. Your focus group has been scheduled for (1:00 - 3:00 p.m. or 3:30 - 5:30) in the (Everglades/Yellowstone Room), which is located on the NUMBER floor of the Hyatt Regency-Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. The Hyatt Regency, located at ADDRESS is the hotel where the Summit will also be held. For your assistance, we have enclosed a map and directions to the Hyatt Regency.

We know how valuable your time is, and we will respect everyone's schedules by both starting and ending on time. We have scheduled two hours for this group interview. So, please allow yourself enough time to reach the Hyatt regency by 1:00 or 3:30.

Once again, we are very pleased that you have accepted our invitation to participate in this very important group interview. Of course, the success of any group depends on each of its members, so

we are counting on you to participate fully in the discussions. If, for some currently unforeseen reason, you need to cancel your trip to Washington in the next few days, please call Dr. Jasmin Riad at (302) 831-6618 immediately.

We look forward to meeting with you on December 8th..

Sincerely yours,

Joanne Nigg, Ph.D.  
Co-Director

Jasmin Riad, Ph.D.  
Post-Doctoral Research Fellow

**APPENDIX B**  
**Questionnaire: Year 1**

## PROJECT IMPACT FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

The purpose of the focus group interviews is to provide suggestions for future changes to the Project Impact initiative as it expands to new communities. Insights from and experiences of community actors already involved in PI communities will be used to provide FEMA with insights about the program from the grass-roots level. Participants in the focus groups will include representatives from different positions (e.g., building officials, emergency managers, elected officials, etc.), different FEMA regions, and varying Project Impact experience levels (e.g., representatives from both the pilot community and from communities added last summer).

We will start by asking you to briefly introduce yourselves and say where you are from—in **one minute or less**. Please tell the group:

1. Your name and the position you hold in your community.
2. When your community joined Project Impact.
3. Whether your community has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place, and if so, when it was signed.
4. One a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 meaning “very little” and 10 meaning “a great deal”) the extent of your personal involvement with Project Impact activities.
5. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 meaning “very little” and 10 meaning “a great deal”), how involved your community is in Project Impact activities.

These are the questions and issues that we will be covering in the two hours that have been set aside for the focus group discussion:

1. List the three (3) primary objectives your community has identified, to date, that will increase its resistance to disaster?
2. From your experience, what do communities need to meet their PI objectives (e.g., specific skills, tools, resources, etc.)?
3. What do PI communities need in order to sustain their momentum toward building a disaster resistant community (including, but not limited to: efforts from the private sector; local regulatory changes; new local programs; assistance from FEMA, other federal agencies, or states)?
4. How can the integration process, across a PI community, be enhanced (i.e., how can the PI message be expanded to all segments of the community in a meaningful way)? Project Impact be expanded to all segments of the community?
5. What strategies have you used to develop partnerships (e.g., with the private sector, state and federal agencies), and how well have they worked to meet your community’s Project Impact goals?
6. What expectations do you think FEMA has for Project Impact; and have they influenced the process, goals, or projects your community has selected? Were the expectations clear in the beginning of the project; and do you think they have changed over time?
7. Is your community doing anything you consider to be creative with respect to Project Impact goals and processes that you think could be useful to other communities?

8. Given your experiences with Project Impact, what do you think could have been done differently—by your own community, your state, FEMA, or others—that would have made starting up Project Impact easier and smoother?
9. What are the two (2) major problems or challenges you have experienced in working on Project Impact?
10. What have been the two (2) highlights or benefits from your personal or your community's experience in Project Impact?

**APPENDIX C**  
**Letter: Year 2**

December X, 1999

NAME  
ADDRESS  
ADDRESS  
ADDRESS

Dear Mr/s NAME:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Project Impact focus group discussion that is being conducted by the University of Delaware's Disaster Research Center on December 12.

As we explained in our earlier telephone call, a focus group is a research technique that uses a group interview with specifically invited people to obtain in-depth information on a particular topic. The goals of the focus group interview in which you will take part are to find out about lessons your community learned through its experiences with Project Impact and to assist new communities that will be included in the program. Your insights and suggestions will also be used to provide FEMA with recommendations on how Project Impact can be changed and strengthened to meet its overall objective of lessening disaster losses nationally by making communities more disaster resistant.

Your focus group will consist of about ten people from various Project Impact communities. You have been selected to take part in the group because of the distinctive position you hold in your community—for example, as an elected official, a planner, an emergency manager, a business person—and because we have tried to obtain very broad representation from different cities, counties, and regions around the country.

In order to assist you in planning for the focus group interview, we are including the list of questions that will be discussed. Please feel free to talk about these questions with others in your community before you come to the focus group, but remember that we will be most interested in **your** personal observations and experiences. One of the "rules" of a focus group interview is that everyone is given an equal opportunity to speak, because even if people have different types and amounts of previous experience, all observations are equally valuable as we make an effort to obtain insights on Project Impact and its future directions.

We will be tape recording the discussion in your focus group so that we can keep a careful record of the things that we hear from you and other members. However, to ensure that everyone feels free to speak candidly, we guarantee the confidentiality of your comments. Any findings and recommendations that come out of the interviews will not be attributed to specific individuals or communities. FEMA recognizes the importance of the need for confidentiality, and that is one reason why DRC, which is an independent research center, was asked to conduct the focus group discussions.

Once again, your focus group will meet on December 12<sup>th</sup>, the day before the official start of FEMA's Project Impact Summit. Your group meeting has been scheduled for 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. in the (Everglades/Yellowstone Room), which is located on the NUMBER floor of the Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, D.C. The Marriott Wardman Park, located at 2660 Woodley Road at Connecticut Ave., is the same hotel where the Summit will be held. To assist you in locating your session, we are including directions to the Marriott and a hotel floor plan.

We know that your time is very valuable, and we will make every effort to respect everyone's busy schedules by both starting and ending on time. We have scheduled two hours for this group



interview, so please be sure to allow yourself enough time to reach your assigned room in the Marriott a few minutes before 4:00pm.

Once again, we are very pleased that you have accepted our invitation to participate in this very important group interview. Of course, the success of any group depends on each of its members, so we are counting on you to participate fully in the discussions. If for some currently unforeseen reason you need to cancel your trip to Washington in the next few days, please call Dr. Jasmin Riad at (302) 831-6618 immediately.

We look forward to meeting with you on December 12th.

Sincerely yours,

Joanne Nigg, Ph.D.  
Co-Director

Kathleen J. Tierney, Ph.D.  
Co-Director

**APPENDIX D**  
Questionnaire: Year 2

## **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ISSUES: 1999 PROJECT IMPACT SUMMIT**

The goals of this focus group discussion are to obtain your views on how Project Impact is progressing in communities around the country and to get your suggestions on how to improve the Project Impact initiative as it expands to other communities. DRC has been asked by FEMA to conduct these discussions because FEMA thinks it is very important to hear what you believe needs to be done in order to sustain the program. To address those issues, we have organized four groups at the Summit. For each group, we have invited Project Impact participants representing different regions of the country, from communities of different sizes, who also hold different positions in their communities—for example, elected officials, emergency managers, building officials, and representatives of private sector organizations involved in Project Impact. In this way, we are trying to capture the perspectives of many different people and communities, while at the same time trying to see if there are common lessons that participants generally agree are important to consider as the program continues and grows.

We will start by asking you to briefly introduce yourselves and say where you are from—in one minute or less. Please tell the group:

1. Your name and the position you hold in your community.
2. When your community joined Project Impact.
3. Whether your community has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place, and if so, when it was signed.
4. One a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 meaning “very little” and 10 meaning “a great deal”) the extent of your personal involvement with Project Impact activities.
5. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 meaning “very little” and 10 meaning “a great deal”), how involved your community is in Project Impact activities.

These are the questions and issues that we will be covering in the two hours that have been set aside for the focus group discussion:

1. What are the three most important goals or activities your community has identified and what is your community doing to move toward those goals?
2. From your perspective, what do Project Impact communities need in order to sustain their momentum toward achieving greater disaster resistance (including, but not limited to: efforts from the private sector; local regulatory changes; new local programs; assistance from FEMA, other federal agencies, or states)?
3. How can Project Impact be expanded to all segments of the community?

4. What strategies has your community used to develop partnerships (e.g., with the private sector or with state and federal agencies), and how well have they worked to meet your community's Project Impact goals? In particular, have there been barriers that you needed to overcome with respect to private sector participation in the program? If so, how were those addressed?
5. Given your experiences with Project Impact, what do you think could have been done differently—by your own community, your state, FEMA, or others—that would have made starting up Project Impact easier and smoother?
6. What are the two major problems or challenges you have experienced in working on Project Impact?
7. In your view, what do communities need in order to move from emphasizing things like public education and awareness to actual physical and structural mitigation programs?
8. Some communities appear to be organizing their Project Impact programs in a very centralized way, with central control and direction of the program being located under one authority or office. Other Project Impact programs are very broad and decentralized, with many different players involved and a more diffuse type of authority. Which of these models corresponds most closely to the way your Project Impact program is organized, and what advantages and disadvantages (if there are any) do you see in having that kind of organization?
9. If you could choose one or two things—besides giving your community more money—that FEMA could do for your success, what would they be?
10. And finally, what advice do you have for FEMA on the direction Project Impact should be taking from this point on?