At-A-Glance: Defining At-risk Populations

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Step 1 – Collect population information and data. Use U.S. Census Bureau and other national data as well as data developed just for your community (studies conducted by area agencies or quasi-governmental organizations, such as a Metropolitan Planning Organization).

Step 2 – Estimate the number of people in at-risk populations who live in your community. Work with your health, emergency, and safety professionals, and other community partners to agree on the definitions you will use for at-risk populations in your community.

Step 3 – Identify overarching organizations/government agencies and the key contacts there that can help you. Collect phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and postal addresses.

Step 4 – Facilitate discussions with key contacts. Topics can include:

- The process of defining at-risk populations
- Long-term goals and objectives
- Other people who should be part of the discussion and their contact information
- Information about the populations under discussion

Step 5 – Stay in touch Keep your partners engaged. Ensure they remain updated on your activities and that you keep up-to-date on any turnover or staff transitions.

How to Use the Information

Develop a simple database that includes your partner contact information. This database will grow throughout the process.

At-a-Glance: Locating At-risk Populations

Step 1 – Assess existing departmental processes to locate at-risk populations

Step 2 – Choose digital mapping or alternate methods. Use Census and other data previously collected to map locations where there are significant numbers of people who are members of at-risk populations. This will help provide a visual representation of where your populations are. Consider working with partner organizations, such as a local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) if departmental resources are not available for digital mapping programs. Also consider using colored pins or dots placed on a map of your community.

Step 3 – Locate and map gathering places for the at-risk populations you have identified. Create a map that shows the locations of community centers, missions, churches, or grocery stores that might be used by at-risk populations in an emergency.

Step 4 – Identify and map trusted sources in the at-risk communities. It is important to find contacts and service providers representing the at-risk population groups, and to know where they can be reached during an emergency.

Step 5 – Facilitate discussions with representatives from community organizations connected with at-risk populations. Talk with leaders and representatives from community organizations that are connected with at-risk populations. Meeting face-to-face the first time will do a lot to build trust and build a solid foundation for an ongoing successful working partnership. Arrange roundtable meetings or conference calls. Discuss goals, objectives, roles, and common issues surrounding the challenges in accurately finding at-risk populations.

Step 6 – Expand your COIN to include service providers, businesses and others who work with, represent and belong to at-risk populations. Members of this network are your community collaborators and program partners. Maintain regular contact with the COIN members through a newsletter, conferences calls, or meetings.

How to Use the Information

- Expand your database by adding contact information for community collaborators and program partners.
- Review the community organizations that helped you locate at-risk populations.
- Develop policies and procedures for the information you gather and maintain confidentiality of contact information for your COIN members.

At-a-Glance: Reaching At-risk Populations

Step 1 – Survey agencies and organizations to learn about their successes and failures. Learn about their successes and failures other departments have faced in reaching at-risk populations.

Step 2 – Conduct focus groups or community roundtables. Focus groups or community roundtables with members of different at-risk population groups can identify their needs and barriers to communication.

Step 3 – Analyze data gathered from the surveys, focus groups, and your previous assessment efforts.

Step 4 – Collaborate with community organizations. Work together with your partners to develop messages and materials that reach at-risk populations.

Step 5 – Identify appropriate, trusted messengers to deliver messages.

How to Use the Information

- Update your database.
- Enhance your communication plan to reach at-risk populations.

At-a-Glance: Next Steps

- Exercise your network with drills and preparedness exercises.
- Expand your scope.

Quick Reference Guide

The Categories

As you start to locate and reach at-risk populations, you can focus on five broad, descriptive characteristics that put people at-risk:

- Economic Disadvantage
- Language and Literacy
- Medical Issues and Disability (physical, mental, cognitive, or sensory)
- Isolation (cultural, geographic, or social)
- Age

Economic Disadvantage: encompasses those people who live at or below the federal poverty level.

Language and Literacy: includes those who have a limited ability to read, speak, write or understand English, have low literacy skills, or who cannot read at all (in English or in their native language).

Medical Issues and Disability: (physical, mental, cognitive, or sensory): includes those with physical, mental, cognitive, or sensory limitations. The most easily recognized people in this category are those who are blind, deaf, and who have health conditions that affect mobility.

Isolation: (cultural, geographic, or social) includes those who are separated from mainstream society, either because of their culture (migrant workers), religious beliefs (Amish), or geographic location (farmers in rural areas).These people can be very difficult to reach in emergencies because they usually do not have access to traditional means of communication.

Age: Chronic health problems, limited mobility, blindness, deafness, social isolation, fear, and reduced income could put older adults at-risk. Infants and children under the age of 18 also can be at-risk, particularly if they are separated from their parents or guardians in an emergency.

Phase 1: Defining At-risk Populations

Defining at-risk populations will require investigation to build an understanding of the unique demographics represented in your particular community. You will need to learn about the spoken languages, cultural practices, belief systems, and the physical and mental limitations of the citizens.

Step 1 – Collect population information and data.

Step 2 – Estimate the number of people in at-risk populations who live in your community

Step 3 – Identify overarching organizations/government agencies and the key contacts that can help you

Step 4 – Facilitate discussions with key contacts

Step 5 – Stay in touch

Develop a Database

An electronic database is one of the best ways to record information so you can track multiple factors, share data with others, and keep information current. Record specific demographic information such as: names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and postal addresses for key contacts at organizations and government agencies.

Phase 2: Locating At-risk Populations

Locating At-risk Populations The best approach to locate at-risk populations in your jurisdiction would be to combine Geographic Information System (GIS) technology with information acquired through community collaborations and networking.

Step 1 – Assess existing departmental processes to locate at-risk populations

Step 2 – Choose digital mapping or alternate methods

Step 3 – Locate and map gathering places for the at-risk populations you have identified

Step 4 – Identify and map trusted sources in the at-risk communities

Step 5 – Facilitate discussions with representatives from community organizations connected with at-risk populations

Step 6 – Expand your COIN to include service providers, businesses, and others who work with, represent, and belong to at-risk populations

Phase 3: Reaching At-risk Populations

In an emergency, messages must not only inform and educate, but they must also mobilize people to follow public health directives.

Step 1 – Survey agencies and organizations to learn about their successes and failures

Step 2 – Conduct focus groups or community roundtables

Step 3 – Analyze data gathered from the surveys, focus groups, and your previous assessment efforts

Step 4 – Collaborate with community organizations

Step 5 – Identify appropriate, trusted messengers to deliver messages