



RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Community social capital linked
to collaborative planning in
emergency management

Emergency management (EM) has evolved to rely increasingly on collaboration across federal, state, and local levels of government, and the business and non-profit sectors. In response, researchers have devoted attention to the factors that increase the likelihood and effectiveness of such collaborations – factors like form of government, the professionalism of emergency managers, and more. A new article from the *American Review of Public Administration* (journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0275074013504127?etoc=) aims to add to the field by examining the effects of community context on EM collaboration, particularly networks of social capital. Authors Bonnie J. Johnson, Holly T. Goerdel, Nicholas P. Lovrich, and John C. Pierce envision social capital as a “community resource from which collaboration might arise.”

Key to the authors’ examination of social capital is distinguishing between networks

that link individuals of differing “demographic, political, and social boundaries” (bridging networks) and those that arise among similar individuals and that “reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups” (bonding networks). They ask how these factors affect capacity for collaboration, which they see as “the creation of stable relationships in planning for future and perhaps multiple crisis” rather than one-time, short-term collaborations that are likely reactive. Referencing previous research, the authors call this long-term collaboration the “soft infrastructure” of collaborative processes. The authors look at both formal and informal modes of collaboration, with formal collaboration defined as formal agreements and MOUs and informal collaboration defined as joint planning and informal cooperation. This distinction is meaningful, as a majority of EM local government managers identify informal contacts with other organizations as those most called upon in times of evacuation or other emergency, according to research cited by the authors.

Ultimately, this work finds that the relative presence of bridging networks in relation to bonding networks in communities makes it more likely that informal modes of collaboration will form among the many stakeholders of long-term EM planning. The authors also find that awareness of potential threats and the use of technology affect collaboration in EM planning. These findings highlight strategies for EM professionals and other public officials and managers overseeing services where timely delivery after disaster is crucial and responsibilities are shared among diverse stakeholders.

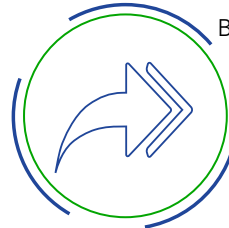
TAKEAWAYS FOR PRACTITIONERS

WORK WITH LEADERS IN THE PUBLIC, BUSINESS, AND NON-PROFIT SECTORS TO ESTABLISH AND SUPPORT ASSOCIATIONS, ESTABLISHMENTS, AND CENTERS THAT FOSTER BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL.



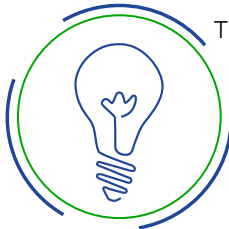
The authors’ key finding is that bridging social capital networks — those that “tend to bring people together across diverse divisions” — are positively associated with higher incidence of informal EM collaborations. Examples of bridging networks include political organizations, which tend to have “collections of interests and networks of potentially diverse elements,” as well as associations like choirs or bowling clubs. The authors suggest this finding may have relevance outside of EM planning, too: “A community’s greater experience with such bridging networks may lead to the heightened standing of inclusive collaboration as a dominant norm for the conduct of public affairs and planning more generally.”

IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO ARE ADEPT “BOUNDARY SPANNERS.”



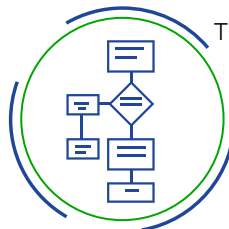
Based on previous research (McGuire and Silvia, 2010), the authors suggest that individuals who can create links across external agencies, organizations, and sectors may be key in creating informal information channels, which have been noted as important for emergency response and recovery.

DEVOTE RESOURCES TO EDUCATING EM PROFESSIONALS AND OTHER POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS ON THE PRESENCE OF EM-RELATED RISKS



These risks include climate change, natural disasters, natural resource depletion, economic and social disparities, and more. This study confirms the findings of previous studies that greater levels of perceived threat from disasters and hazards are positively associated with greater levels of EM collaboration, both formal and informal.

CONSIDER THE USE OF SOPHISTICATED TECHNOLOGY LIKE WEB EOC, E-TEAM, CAMEO/ALPHA, AND GIS IN EM OPERATIONS.



This study confirms the findings of previous studies that the use of these technologies and particularly of GIS to dispatch, manage resources, identify persons or facilities for notification of potential hazards, assess risk, etc. is positively associated with greater levels of EM collaboration, both formal and informal.

DISCUSSION

The fabric of everyday life supports emergency response and recovery, and gaining a better understanding of the texture of everyday life and livelihoods, particularly in cities and counties where social networks span demographic, political, and social categories holds great potential. It is an opportunity to learn more about social capital's potential to increase public preparedness for disaster and readiness to collaborate. Practitioners' accounts of witnessing such stories in action and how they accelerated emergency response and recovery in their community would be invaluable to this end.

FOR FURTHER READING



From The Intersector Project Toolkit:

- Engage Potential Partners: The identification of and engagement with individuals and organizations that have a stake in the issue the collaboration wishes to address to assess their suitability for and interest in joining the collaboration (intersector.com/toolkit/engage-potential-partners/)

From The Intersector Project Case Library:

- Creating a Culture of Disaster Preparedness in San Francisco (intersector.com/case/sf72_sanfrancisco/)

From Intersector Insights:

- Collaborative emergency management system connects residents before, during disasters (intersector.com/collaborative-emergency-management-program-connects-citizens-before-during-disasters/)
- Intersector collaboration in Ohio works to improve coordination in disasters (intersector.com/intersector-collaboration-in-ohio-works-to-improve-coordination-in-disasters/)
- Navigating intersector collaborations in resilience (intersector.com/navigating-intersector-collaborations-resilience/)

Other resources:

- The Effect of Problem Severity, Managerial and Organizational Capacity, and Agency Structure on Intergovernmental Collaboration: Evidence from Local Emergency Management (onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2010.02134.x/abstract)
- A Framework for Improving Cross-Sector Coordination for Emergency Preparedness and Response: Action Steps for Public Health, Law Enforcement, the Judiciary and Corrections (cdc.gov/phlp/docs/CDC_BJA_Framework.pdf)

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