

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE NEW YORK CITY FAITH SECTOR

For
The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response



Prepared By



New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS) is grateful to New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response (DOHMH OEPR) for awarding NYDIS the contract for the Community Preparedness Program initiative, and sharing our long held vision to assess the resilience of New York City's Faith Sector. DOHMH's leadership and commitment to fund resiliency efforts increases our sector's capacity to prepare for public health emergencies.

This Community Needs Assessment of the NYC Faith Sector focuses on disaster and public health emergency readiness of our sector – and it has provided critical information not otherwise accessible.

Special thanks to the Interfaith Center of New York, NYDIS' federation members, the Majlis Ashura (Islamic Leadership Council) of New York, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York and Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens, and the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York for their dedicated outreach efforts to participants for all assessment discussion groups.

Lastly, we would like to express our thanks and profound gratitude to all the individual lay and ordained religious leaders who participated in the discussion groups of the New York City Faith Sector – from congregations, religious bodies and other organizations. Without their insights, honesty and willingness to share their experience, knowledge and observations, we would not have the depth or breadth of relevant information that we now can disseminate in this report.

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New York City's faith communities represent approximately 5.5 million New Yorkers, the majority holding Roman Catholic, Protestant Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faith traditions.¹ These communities and their institutions are essential to the city's vitality, and are major contributors to the well-being, financial stability, and cultural richness of the City as a whole – and, the neighborhoods that are its lifeblood and spirit. Nevertheless, many of these faith communities have historically felt isolated from one another and from government initiatives, including disaster and public health readiness efforts. In order to identify specific assets, gaps and barriers found across and within specific target groups of the Faith Sector, and essentially make recommendations towards inclusiveness and recognition in a sustained way, this assessment of the Faith Sector's current readiness status was undertaken.

Given the prominence of New York City's faith communities in civic life, and their social and political capital, there was a keen interest in this assessment project from the leadership of major faith communities as well as ethnic, racial, and religious minority groups. This interest was amplified by the impact and visibility of hazards that have affected New Yorkers, including September 11, Anthrax, H1N1 influenza, SuperStorm Sandy, and Ebola, to name a few.

The assessment process and mechanisms documented some long-established assumptions, but also captured novel gaps in knowledge and practice. Many participants knew about and didn't use, or displayed an unfamiliarity with even the most basic government and nonprofit disaster management mechanisms, systems and programs (AWS, CERT, HAN, NotifyNYC, NYCVOAD). Yet, virtually all participants shared a keen interest in learning more, to be more intentional about educating themselves and their congregations or organizations about risk and resilience, to seek out a wide variety of trainings, to connect with and develop mechanisms for risk communication, and to partner with government and faith-based networks with an expertise in justice-oriented disaster human services and public health emergency interventions.

The main barriers identified by survey respondents focused on the need for resources, free tools and training, and the need for more formal and sustained government focus on the assets and needs of faith communities. Participants generally conveyed a perception that government and emergency management mechanisms lacked operational cultural and religious competence. There was also a perceived disconnect in that government asks and needs a lot from the Faith Sector, but has not historically provided the funding or tool/training(s) necessary for faith communities to do the work themselves, particularly to build capacity and sustain strategic partnerships.

Another challenge, is the experience or perceptions of religious intolerance and institutionalized racism. Some religious minorities have been rebuffed when requesting religious considerations in the context of disasters, such as gender separation during emergency shelter and religious dietary needs in mass care operations – also noted was the scheduling of exercises and other events on Sabbath days. Not providing reasonable religious accommodations can create a level of mistrust and foster further social isolation of

¹The Association or Religious Data Archives, www.thearda.com.

faith groups. Ethnic, racial and religious minority groups are often the most vulnerable populations in need of services during emergencies. It is imperative that mass care, medical health services, and disaster human services are culturally and religiously competent. Religious literacy is needed throughout the disaster lifecycle – mitigation through long-term recovery. A strategic way to institute religious literacy and competency is through better training of government personnel and secular providers – as well as, a thorough review of public health emergency plans, and sustained engagement of NYC faith communities and their leaders.

Most participants in this assessment experienced some direct impact from recent crises that affected this City. Although many had devoted time and resources to address perceived gaps in unmet needs, few outside of the senior leadership of, among others, members of the Human Services Council (HSC), NYCVOAD, or NYDIS understood the formal mechanisms for collaboration.

It was evident that institutional knowledge of these systems has been and continues to be held by a very small number of leaders – who often have no direct oversight of or influence over crisis planning or decision making, and that it has not been understood at even a basic level by most organization staff, let alone congregation judicatories or nonprofit leaders. Most assume that “someone else knows about this and I don’t need to.” This assessment process made it clear to participants that all leaders of all faith communities need a basic understanding of disaster readiness, response, and recovery – how to lead institutions, their staff, clients, and congregations to respond and assist in times of need.

Target groups assessed included Congregations,² Religious (Judicatory) Bodies,³ and Faith-based Nonprofits (FBNPs).⁴ The combined findings from the groups allow a comprehensive and methodical overview of the Faith Sector’s main players – and, who isn’t at the table. While congregants or community members themselves were not assessed, the religious leaders and organizational decision makers generally represented the viewpoints of their members.

This report and the subsequent recommendations represent current operating assumptions, survey findings, and NYDIS’ subject matter expertise with 15 years of building networks, developing resources, and providing community resilience guidance for the Faith Sector. Findings were based on responses to this mixed-methods assessment which incorporated both a survey and discussion groups from responding faith community religious leaders.

² Houses of worship of all faiths and their leaders (e.g. a church, mosque, or temple).

³ An administrative structure or organization with temporal and/or spiritual authority over or coordinates the life and ministry of congregations and other institutions owned or advised by a religious body (e.g. a diocese, synod, or federation).

⁴ A nonprofit organization under the jurisdiction of a religious body or operating under a religious mission.

ARC	American Red Cross
AWS	Advanced Warning System
BP	Borough President
CAN	Coordinated Assistance Network
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
COOP	Continuity of Operations Plan
DOHMH	Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
FBNP	Faith-based Nonprofit
FDNY	Fire Department (City) of New York
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
Force Multipliers	Umbrella organizations, federations or organizations that assist with increasing and bettering effectiveness and utilization of an event or activity
FBO	Faith-based Organization
H1N1	Influenza A virus subtype H1N1
HAN	Health Alert Network
HOWCALM System	House of Worship Community-wide Asset and Logistics Management System
HSC	Human Services Council
ICS	Incident Command System
Interfaith	Involving persons of differing faiths or religions. For the purposes of this report, the Interfaith focus groups are also referred to, and at times used interchangeably, as multi-faith focus groups targeting minority faith communities, depending on context
Judiciary	Religious body with jurisdiction over a specific faith tradition or cluster of congregations
Minority Faith Communities	A faith tradition comprising a minority of the population of a country, state or region, and that tend to have a minority voice in a political or decision making process. For the purposes of this assessment, inclusive of Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, et cetera.
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Medical Reserve Corps
Multi-faith	To be inclusive of, or to feel an affinity towards, aspects of more than one religion, philosophy or world view
Notify NYC	City-wide emergency notification system
NYC DOHMH	New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
NYCEM	New York City Emergency Management
NYDIS	New York Disaster Interfaith Services
NYDISnet & NYDISnet ALERTS	NYDIS' electronic communication platform
NYSCTF	New York State Chaplains Task Force
NYS DHES	New York State Department of Homeland and Emergency Services
OEPR	DOHMH's Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response
Risk Communication	An integral method of exchanging information and communicating vital messaging in crisis, emergency and non-emergency situations
Faith Sector	The Faith Sector
UJA	United Jewish Appeal-Federation of NY
VOAD	Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster: National, New York State, and New York City

Aims

This integrated report was developed, analyzed, and distributed to answer three aims:

1. To evaluate the capability and capacity of identified target groups, namely Congregations, Religious (Judicatory) Bodies and Faith-based Nonprofits (FBNP), throughout NYC. In short, how or if they prepare for, take steps to mitigate, respond to, and recover from public health emergencies and/or natural and human-caused disasters.
2. To identify gaps in communication, coordination, training and other barriers within, across and between the Faith Sector, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) and other city-wide emergency management agencies and their partners.
3. To provide recommendations for NYDIS and DOHMH to best target resources and expertise to future public health emergency and resilience initiatives.

Methods

Quantitative data were gathered through a New York City wide electronic survey geared towards the specific target groups identified above. The survey was distributed online through Survey Monkey to 6,017 New York City religious leaders throughout the Faith Sector, including 5,700 Congregations, 97 Religious (Judicatory) Bodies and 220 Faith-based Nonprofits. 223 (3.7%) people responded to the survey.

Qualitative responses supplemented the survey data via 5 discussion groups, with a total of 45 participants, representing Congregations, Religious (Judicatory) Bodies and Faith-based Nonprofits from across all 5 boroughs of NYC (including Jewish, Muslim, Roman Catholic groups as well as two multi-faith groups to ensure the broadest possible representation in responses).

Both the qualitative and quantitative tools were distributed throughout all NYC boroughs with racial, economic and language constructs in mind. Language usage varies according to location and specific communities served and Spanish, Chinese (all dialects) and Hebrew or Yiddish, are the majority of Non-English languages spoken within all target groups. However, due to funding constraints, the survey tools were only available in English and Spanish.

Limitations

Discussion Groups

Because of the exploratory nature of the discussion groups which involved small samples drawn without use of statistical procedures, the following report should be read as preliminary and should be further explored. While information collected through these discussion groups provided clear direction on certain issues, they were conducted primarily to provide insights into perceptions of faith communities related to emergency preparedness, response and recovery planning in NYC.

METHODOLOGY

Online Survey

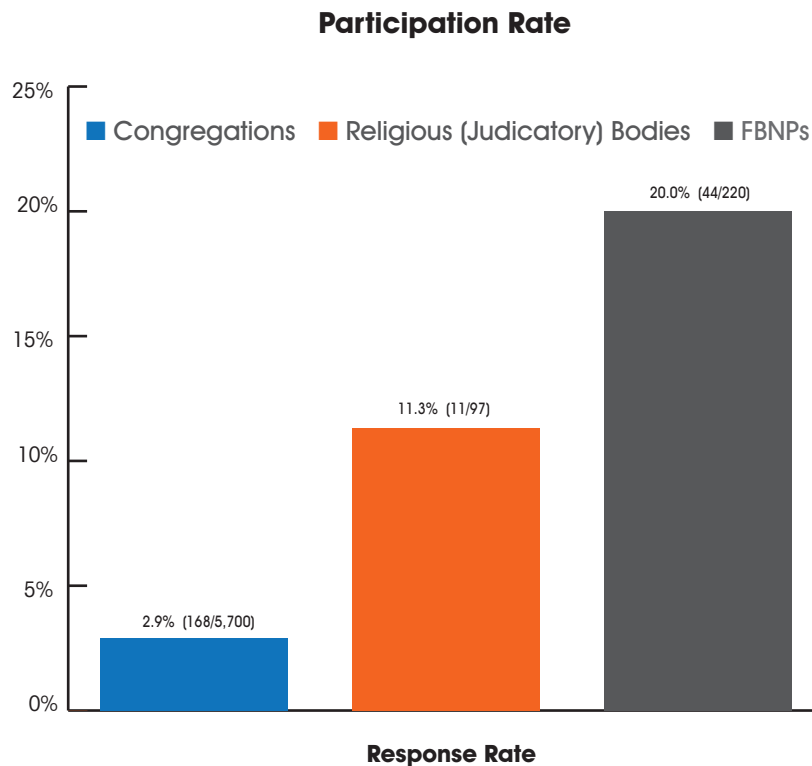
The goal was to collect representative feedback from faith-based leaders of Congregations, Religious (Judicatory) Bodies and Faith-based Nonprofits, not all groups ended being equally represented. Despite our efforts only 3.7% responded to the online survey. This sample size of the completed survey is too low to allow us to generalize or make overarching statements on the readiness, capacities, and capabilities of these entities.

Demographics of Responding Organizations

SURVEY PARTICIPATION RATES

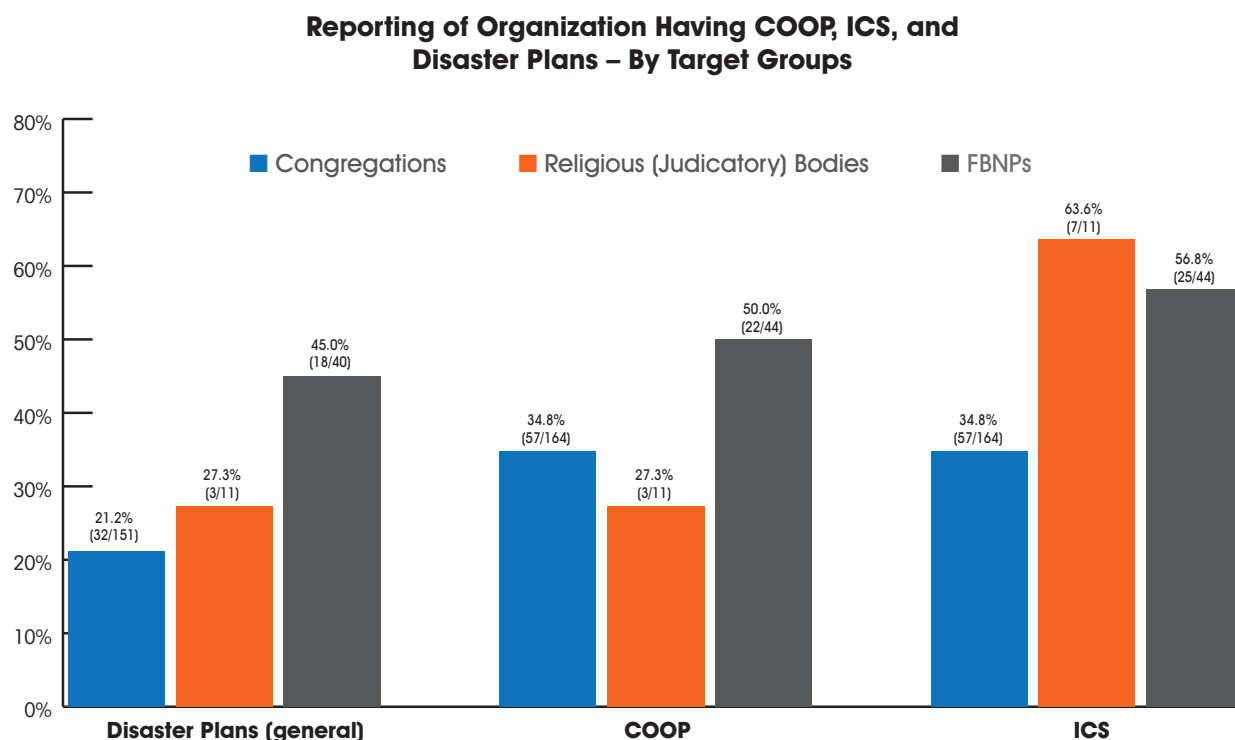
The survey was distributed to 6,017 New York City religious leaders throughout Faith Sector, including an approximate 5,700 Congregations, 97 Religious (Judicatory) Bodies, and 220 FBNPs. 223 surveys had responses, with a rate of (3.7%).

Table 1- Survey Participation Rate



LEADERSHIP, RISK COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES, AND CAPABILITIES

Table 2 – Participants Reporting Their Organization as Having COOP, ICS, and Disaster Plans – By Target Groups



Note: Fractions in table represent the Number of Respondents with Specific Plan/Number of Respondents Answered

Usage of an Incident Command System (ICS)

63.6% of the Religious (Judiciary) Body respondents, 56.8% of the FBNP leaders and 34.8% of the congregation respondents have implemented some form of an incident command system for decision making in times of crisis.

Usage of a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)

34.8% of the congregations, 27.3% of the Religious (Judiciary) Bodies, and 50% of the FBNPs self-reported as having a Continuity of Operation Plan (COOP).

While many in the discussion groups indicated they know of these two tools, the majority of respondents failed to implement them.

Access to and use of (risk) communication platforms

Resources and knowledge about how to successfully implement and use risk communication platforms are lacking, and those that were found to be in place are antiquated and/or not utilized to their full extent. Of concern is that although participants throughout the Faith Sector indicated familiarity with at least one city-wide emergency messaging system, findings indicated a low subscription. Reasons for this vary:

- Congregations are largely dependent on either their prescribed decision-making structures; or rely on a cultural practice of local community messaging and networking systems, particularly for many of the minority faith communities.
- Minority faith communities, immigrant communities and non-English speaking communities were found to rely principally on their own networks (i.e., local TV/radio stations, social media).
- A gap in communication and accurate transfer of information through language and cultural/religious specific risk communications was found between both mid-level management and leadership among the Religious (Judicatory) Bodies, FBNPs, and the congregations and communities they serve.

Several participants from one of the multi-faith discussion groups,⁵ despite limited facilities and monetary resources, spoke in great detail about their ability to regularly practice coordinated communication, decision-making, and service provision across geographic locations, jurisdictions and faith communities. They coordinate via their local cultural or religious networks and sources of information, as well as local police jurisdictions⁶ suggesting that “if there is a will, there is a way.” This coordination is absent of government involvement, and directly contradicted the limitations or restrictions found in some of the larger, better-resourced Religious (Judicatory) Bodies, and FBNP responses.

Despite low subscribership, the basic infrastructure exists for Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) to better utilize state-of-the-art risk communication platforms, like NYDIS’ House of Worship Alert (HowAlert) which leverages Send Word Now® platform for advanced communication, including mass email, texting, voice messaging as well as sending web-based assessment forms and retrieving digital responses. NYDIS uses this platform for its own emergency communications as well as sharing NYCEM, DOHMH, NYCVOAD messaging/news, deploying volunteers, and collecting damage and survivor assessments.

⁵ Two discussion groups incorporated religious leaders of interfaith organizations of multiple minority faith traditions.

⁶ Quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of these responses and service provisions were not assessed.

Nearly all of the respondents across target groups stated that they have access to the internet, have a website, and/or used phone and text messaging for regular, non-emergency communications. Similarly, the majority of respondents had or used at least one common social media platform that could be leveraged during crisis events.

Most respondents have a Facebook account, using it for advocacy and social justice related “business” – yet, reportedly do not use the platform to share information in emergency situations. Further, while only 30% of respondents from congregations and 27% from Religious (Judicatory) Bodies utilize Twitter, the majority of the FBNP respondents, 60%, do. Several survey respondents also indicated that they use Instagram. As indicated earlier, it is important to emphasize that these findings indicate usage by the religious leaders and/or their organizations themselves, not for members of the congregations they serve.

Of the platforms assessed, the Religious (Judicatory) Bodies were the only target group that reported that they had or would quickly post information to an institutional website in an emergency situation, and at most 57% of the respondents were able to quickly post to social media accounts in an emergency. At present, email was still found to be the most widely used communication method, following phone trees then texting between staff as well as between staff, and their congregations.

PLANNING, TRAINING AND READINESS

Formalized disaster preparedness plans

Fewer than 1/3 of total respondents reported having a formal disaster plan (Table 3). Out of these, there was a wide range indicating to have practiced that plan within the last 12, 24, or 36 months (Table 3 and 4). Leaders from both the Religious (Judicatory) Bodies and FBNPs were generally unaware if their houses of worship congregants, clients, or partners had plans themselves (even if required), and/or if these plans were practiced. Importantly, a lack of time and resources, coupled with an absence of specific internal organization or city-wide mandates was indicated throughout all focus groups as a barrier for better coordination of such tools. It is clear that a lack of interest was not their deterrent, but that the perceived need for expertise, designating human resources, already scarce funds, or re-allocating staff hours to develop and implement these plans would take away from routine tasks and other mandates already in place.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

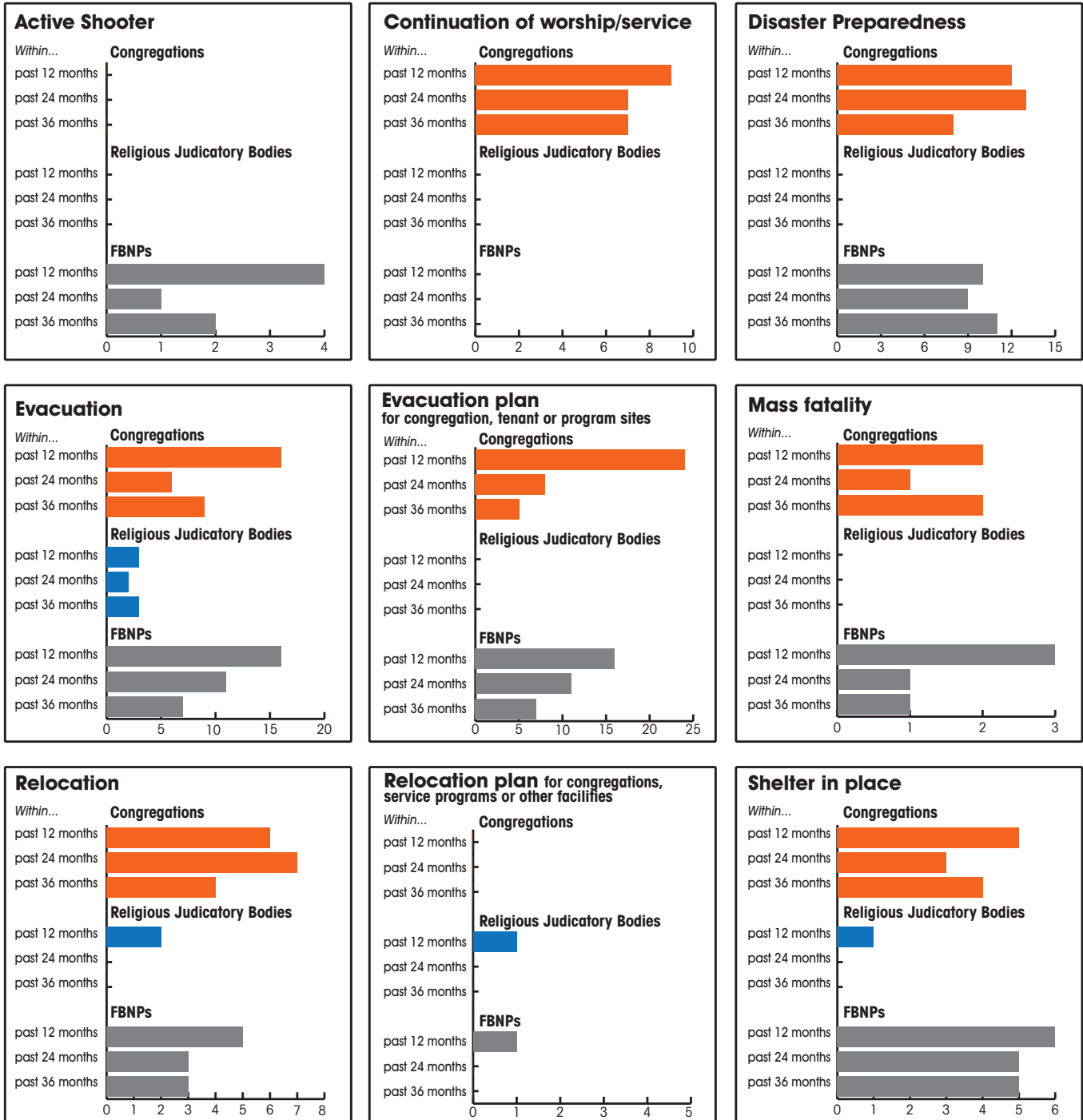
Table 3- Disaster plan(s), all target groups

n= total number of yes responses N= total number of respondents

Type of Plan	Congregations N= 151	Religious (Judicatory) Bodies N= 11	Faith-based Nonprofits N= 40
Active Shooter	n= 14	n= 2	n= 6
Continuation of Worship/Operations	n= 27	NA	NA
Disaster Preparedness	n= 32	n= 3	n= 14
Evacuation Plan (Coastal Storm)	n= 59	n= 4	n= 24
Evacuation (Facility)	n= 45	NA	n= 17
Mass Fatality	n= 8	n= 0	n= 4
Relocation Plan (Administrative Offices)	n= 23	n= 3	n= 10
Relocation Plan (Program)	NA	n= 2	n= 1
Shelter-In Place	n= 16	n= 1	n= 10

Table 4

Practice Rate of Disaster Preparedness Plans – All Target Groups



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Emergency Training

In a post 9/11 era, training and disaster-related education is regularly being offered by government and its nonprofit partners to staff, clients or partners, or congregation members throughout the Faith Sector – as gleaned from both survey and focus group results. Yet, interest in more of both was widely indicated once focus group participants with knowledge started sharing the breadth and depth of trainings that are available. Specifically, the majority of participants across all focus groups indicated a great interest in developing disaster preparedness plans (both general and specific), to improve community based disaster preparedness training, and to subscribe to and utilize risk communication systems already in place.

Even so, while the survey data also indicates familiarity with several NYC-based emergency management agencies, partners and communication systems, there is a low rate of engagement with and/or usage of these tools. This gap is widely due to a lack of technical knowledge of the tools and their uses – as well as perceived minimal capacities, capabilities, or discrepancies within current institutional mandates.

Minority faith communities desire better community engagement

Many of the respondents in the Faith Sector indicated a desire for better community engagement, and that having it would improve resiliency and readiness efforts. This desire was specifically and repeatedly emphasized by the minority faith communities, those that tend to be most vulnerable and, due to a lack of resources and access to tools and training, least prepared. Some participants articulated that racism and a lack of religious competency are also barriers to preparedness. In order to increase interest and engagement from within neighborhoods, it was emphasized that government efforts include community and cultural specific needs.

Across the Faith Sector, the population of immigrants, refugees, and those with non-US Citizenship was found to be both an asset and challenge for developing and instituting sustained efforts. For example, language gaps, fears based on real or perceived threats, and/or a mistrust of the system due to previous experiences, and real or perceived biases are present, and subsequently influence gaps in risk communication and in disaster readiness training. Yet, awareness of these factors could help mitigate barriers in future efforts. Half of the Congregation respondents and a majority of discussion group participants indicated that a large makeup of their respective communities and/or congregations are immigrant or non-U.S. Citizens, and to improve engagement with these communities, it essential to be culturally and religiously competent.

RESOURCES: HUMAN, MATERIAL, AND BUDGET

Funding, Mandates, and Time Constraints

Very few respondents across the Faith Sector indicated that they have a budget line dedicated to disaster and/or public health readiness. Instead, virtually all continue to rely on sporadic post-disaster relief or recovery grants from their National VOAD (NVOAD) agency partner, should they have one, and as they become available. Yet these grants and other funding opportunities are often competitive and at times difficult to access. It was also indicated that the strain in funding often limits, or creates bottlenecks, in relief and recovery services. This is a long-standing challenge and indicated a need for systemic change in how resources should be applied to resilience building and preparedness so that more communities can bounce back from crisis rather than rely on slow paced long-term recovery.

It was also generally observed that access to preparedness funding is virtually non-existent from NVOAD or government. Furthermore, participants from the multi-faith discussion groups indicated that minority faith communities often had a difficult time accessing the grants that do exist – simply because the well-branded and large direct service providers have the skill as well as social and political capital to win most government contracts or be awarded the largest grants – leave little, if any funding, for neighborhood-based and minority organizations.

“Post event (funding) should be geared towards the greater affected communities, should be more inclusive of minority faith communities and include language and culturally relevant aspects to the larger communities.”

Human and Material Resources

The data collected from the survey regarding facilities, access to material resources, institutional and organizational capabilities, and geographic location provide insight as to what assets are currently available for mapping and for possible use in future public health emergencies. Also, due to the differences in capacities and mandates between responding institutions, as well as the varying nature of each target group’s general missions, there was no specific pattern as to material or facility resources.⁷ It is of note that this trend was not as clear when assessing availability and access to volunteers, or other human resources. For example, Congregations reported to have a larger volunteer pool than the other target groups. In the majority of discussion groups, this was attributed to better neighborhood-based congregations and networks.

⁷ Material resources include: building specific spaces and resources (including ADA compliance), shelter and feeding capabilities, space for or experience as a point of distribution, generators, showers, kid friendly spaces, gender specific spaces, and spaces specific for observant faith communities (e.g. kosher compliant, etc.).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Service Delivery and Physical Locations

Location of programs and services varied among target groups. Congregation programs and services were predominately neighborhood-based, while many of the Religious (Judicatory) Bodies were responsible for multiple or all boroughs – or other counties, states, and even national jurisdiction. In particular, FBNPs represented and served both borough specific and city-wide catchment areas, with few indicating regional, state, and national jurisdictions. This presents as a significant challenge due to the extent of multi-jurisdictional responsibilities and subsequent scarcity of time and/or resources dedicated to efforts for what may be considered as extra responsibilities. Additionally, it can present as a challenge when designing and implementing initiatives due to a wide range of targeted locational needs.

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Strengths

Desire for engagement

Participants' desire increased engagement in public health readiness efforts. The majority of participants felt that historic (and ongoing) mistrust and biases could be healed and transformed with increased religious competency and efforts towards intentional inclusiveness. Although attempts to break through real or perceived barriers have been felt as sparse, inconsistent, and at times delayed, participants in discussion groups recognized that they exist. Currently there is a momentum from faith leaders, as well as government agencies, to increase readiness by addressing gaps in preparedness, response, and recovery capabilities.

The Faith Sector sees itself as a critical, or the primary, resource to their adherents and clients

As described above, NYC faith communities represent well over 5 million New Yorkers. While it is not only imperative to better integrate their functional expertise in city-wide disaster and public health readiness efforts, leaders of these communities and their institutions see themselves, their capacities, and their assets found within all neighborhoods and communities as a vital, or the only, resource for the vulnerable populations. It was generally acknowledged that both religious leaders and their congregations can act as a gatekeeper into the local nuances of community needs, where they are the most trusted resource, and that they should be utilized regularly to build resiliency. More intentional inclusion of faith community representation in city-wide resiliency planning processes that directly impact faith communities and their constituents is desired. They acknowledge this assessment as one of several stepping stones towards making this happen.

Challenges

Distrust

One of the challenges of this assessment was obtaining a representative number of responses from target groups throughout the Faith Sector. This was somewhat attributed to external factors such as the assessment overlapping with various religious holidays, recipients feeling generally overburdened and stretched thin for time, or not having the ability or authority to prioritize the time to complete the survey. There was also an expressed feeling of skepticism across target groups. It was also insinuated that since the survey wasn't distributed by someone with direct authority within their specific faith community, participation was limited.

“... will my name remain anonymous... will my information be used correctly... how do I know that this information will help my specific (Congregation) or (Organization)...”

The information garnered emphasized the need for engagement with the various target groups to be nuanced, and religiously, culturally and ethnically relevant. Due to previous experiences with broken trust; a perceived lack of effort, on the part of government agencies, to adapt messaging to include religious literacy and perceived biases (i.e. security measures targeting specific faith or racial communities), there was some resistance and suspicion of this assessment and, without more skilled effort, future government sponsored initiatives.

Also, while efforts that have included faith communities in readiness initiatives over the past several years were acknowledged, they were also described as inconsistent and unreliable, particularly by the minority faith communities. In contrast, the larger, well-resourced Religious (Judicatory) Bodies and FBNPs, (i.e. the Jewish and Roman Catholic institutions), experienced these efforts to be somewhat more valuable. This contradiction in how faith communities perceive and receive city-wide initiatives should be taken into consideration in the strategic development and implementation of future initiatives.

Few Resources, Marginal Funding, and Institutional Mandates

Survey respondents consistently identified the absence of dedicated staffing, emergency preparedness funding, and conflicting needs with institutional mandates as barriers to preparing for emergencies. This was particularly so for the Religious (Judicatory) Body and FBNP respondents. Compounded with feedback of the Faith Sector leaders already being overworked and under-resourced, the combination of being held to specific mandates and policies without necessary funding is a barrier for decision makers in putting more efforts towards readiness.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This is highlighted by the amount of responsibilities falling to a small number of people, as was pointed out across target groups and throughout all discussion groups. Reported budget cuts coupled with increased responsibilities has led to general apathy and inability to veer from described roles and duties. For example, one discussion group participant indicated that she did not widely distribute the survey link to congregations and houses of worship that fell under her responsibility because it was not in her mandate, and she felt protective of the Congregation leaders' time.

Also, discussion group participants from Religious (Judicatory) Bodies indicated they provide borough-based programs and services – and, many of their responsibilities and jurisdictions covered multiple boroughs and/or were city and state based. This scale of responsibilities, stretched thin both geographically and logistically, was highlighted as another reason for hesitating to adopt, or completely rejecting, tasks that may be considered “off mission” or extra responsibilities. Lastly, many participants indicated that “the assessment did not pertain to [our] specific organization,” even though recognizing the utmost importance of disaster roles. Four respondents considered the survey government intrusion.

Gaps in Communication and Coordination

Large gaps in communication and coordination were found. Of note, there was a general lack of consistent understanding or knowledge of certain organizational mandates as it pertains to disaster and public health readiness. When coupled with a gap in communication between mid-level and senior-level management and decision-makers, it is reported to result in efforts that are not consistently coordinated, overlapping and at times contradicting. Also, lack of information shared between these two leadership roles and the congregations they serve was noted. Discussion group respondents displayed a feeling of indifference and lack of confidence in city-wide agencies, both government and private, largely attributed to some of the findings discussed above, namely being “overworked, underfunded, and under-resourced.”

Gaps in types of communication between local community members and the religious leaders or other decision makers, as well as with city-wide risk messaging, was identified as a problem that exists throughout the Faith Sector. Even so, interest to lessen these gaps exist. Language barriers, isolated informal social networks, low subscribership to emergency messaging and a lack of feedback loops to follow up with recipients of messages were found as principal explanations, and can lead to missed information during critical times. While this presents a challenge in both the delivery of messaging and how to best accommodate recipients, it also impacts the efficiency and capacity for coordination efforts.

Findings from the *Community Needs Assessment of the NYC Faith Sector* present a diverse landscape of the disaster and public health emergency readiness capacities and capabilities of FBOs throughout New York City. We believe that the recommendations put forward will improve emergency preparedness, recovery, and resiliency within the Faith Sector. They are grouped into four broad categories: relationships, training, communication and resources.

Relationship Building

1. Formalize and prioritize Faith Sector partnerships and regular face-to-face networking opportunities between faith communities and their leaders – as well as between faith communities, their leaders and government.
2. Identify, contract, and fund Faith Sector force-multipliers to build resilience via training and operationalizing faith based assets, capacities, and capabilities.

Identify Training Needs then Develop and Deliver Trainings

1. Regularly assess and identify priority training topics, preparedness initiatives, and operational capabilities that addresses Faith Sector needs and those of constituent leaders, congregants, or clients.
2. Develop or identify education and preparedness resources and tool kits that are both religiously literate and competent, as well as culturally relevant and language specific for Congregations, Religious (Judicatory) Bodies, and FBNPs.
3. Develop or partner to sponsor conferences, trainings, and exercises that center on how to use resources and tools, that are aimed at developing skill sets, and that strengthen disaster and public health testing capabilities. These events should be directed at all Faith Sector institutions of varying skill levels, be culturally and religiously competent, give prominence to minority needs, and always have dedicated time for networking, feedback, and evaluations of programs offered.
4. Trainings for “deployable” roles (chaplains) should include certifications, ID badges, and deployment gear that government will formally recognize, principally through MOUs with deploying agencies that use recognized national training standards – and, enforce that standard to help eliminate confusion amongst first responders with “pretender” entities.
5. Limit the use of “one-off” events – those that gather folks once, and don’t connect them to sustainable peer-to-peer or government partner relationships that increase resilience.
6. When possible, while scheduling training events for professional and voluntary leaders (lay or ordained), days of religious observance should be taken into account, particularly because volunteers and bi-vocational clergy make up a large percentage of Faith Sector organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. Incentivize participation in training events by offering them no-cost participation, providing appropriate food and refreshments, encouraging networking, and making sure participants leave with takeaways. Religious leaders often appreciate display certificates to demonstrate to colleagues and congregants that they have expertise and relationships.

Build or Strengthen Current Communications Systems

1. Encourage or require (in funding contracts) senior religious leaders – those that have been with an institution for a substantial length of time, and that have specific training or extensive experience with disaster and/or public health preparedness and recovery efforts – to be assigned external partnership roles so that institutional knowledge, relationships, and operational awareness are sustained, as well as incorporated into institutional and government transition planning.⁸
2. Offering trainings which incorporate mechanism(s) or preparedness programs which incentivize and monitor if congregations have COOP, Preparedness or Communication Plans, have practiced these plans, and engage in training or other resilience measures.
3. Improve connections, visibility and access to government disaster/public health emergency messaging platforms (HAN, Notify NYC, AWS). Also, collaborate with, or formalize via MOU, Faith Sector force-multipliers to adapt, when appropriate, emergency messaging with a faith-based context and encourage or require their wider use, for example, NYDIS' HOWalert (House of Worship Alerts via Send Word Now[®] text/messaging).
4. As congregations have existing networks and resource/services utilized in neighborhoods, develop capacity building and technical assistance programs to help them improve their communication plans and systems.
5. Strengthen government's religious competency and staff capacity for Faith Sector engagement, with an emphasis supporting and improving the Faith Sector's existing capabilities and capacity rather than creating new systems.
6. Strengthen and utilize existing judicatory bodies and faith-based networks rather than creating new systems – using caution not to over-develop neighborhood and borough-based networks that tax the limited funding and staff resources of both small and large city-wide partner agencies. Discussion groups urged use of existing entities created by faith communities' for increasing trust, and emphasizing to the Faith Sector and constituent communities that human and institutional resilience is in fact in the City's best interests.

⁸ Due to the nature of funding for disaster related employment, positions often have a high turn around, leaving those in entry or mid-level roles with little institutional knowledge and/or experience, resulting in repeated efforts.

Increase Resources and Funding

1. Develop funding streams (via government sources and/or educating and partnering with the philanthropic sector) to build and sustain the Faith Sector's capacity, resilience, risk communication tools, and maintain a robust networking, training, and planning posture.
2. Because faith communities typically do not have the funding or expertise to employ resiliency related staffing, government and/or philanthropy partners should identify and offer funding sources to build that capability broadly within the Faith Sector. By funding these positions, they will serve as force multipliers to increase resiliency within the Faith Sector.
3. Provide training and resources to increase the Faith Sector's volunteer pool and improve connections to city-wide agencies and congregations, as well as enable better access to already established disaster networks.
 - a. Encourage or seed the development of a single or small number of non-overlapping Sector managed ICS structure risk communication platforms that meet government and Faith Sector communication needs at the community level, inclusive of cultural and language relevancy (i.e. the expanded use of HOWalert).
 - b. Every religious body should have communication technology or be able to partner with external force-multipliers to utilize shared platforms.
 - c. All Sector Religious (Judicatory) Bodies or force-multipliers should have a written and practiced plan for risk communication, damage/survivor assessment, and sharing recovery resources for their entire network of leaders, congregations or nonprofits.

CONCLUSION

The Faith Sector is comprised of the most trusted leaders in New York City – and, ubiquitous institutions with both lay and credentialed/ordained leaders who interact daily or weekly with a majority of individual New Yorkers; and as such, faith communities are the keystone of the City’s whole-community resilience.

This assessment’s findings demonstrate a clear interest and commitment to building resilience, and to improving how faith communities communicate about risk, how they prepare for disaster and emergency response and how they can help both adherents and all New Yorkers in times of crisis.

The recommendations listed above use assessment data to focus on how to build sustainable and effective partnerships between faith communities, government, and emergency management agencies. As well as identify existing or newly developed resources and tools which are needed to help Faith Sector leaders build skills or equip their clients, staff, and congregations to prepare for and respond to crises. Through being intentionally inclusive and religiously literate and competent, together we can build and sustain Faith Sector relationships which break every barrier identified herein.

