

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

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

**Report to the  
Federal Emergency Management Agency**

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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.**

Examples of Mitigation Activities
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
Unique Activities Mentioned In 1999 Focus Groups
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 though 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 though 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 difference 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?