Use of a Theoretical Framework for Coalition Building and Evaluation Among Five Healthcare Disciplines in Massachusetts

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Challenges of Effective Emergency Response

One of the most common and challenging issues is effective and timely communications
  – Particularly true across health and public health disciplines
  – Towns work independently
  – Regions work independently
  – Health care disciplines work in silos
  – There are few cross cutting regional partnerships.
Partnership for Effective Emergency Response (PEER)

**Purpose:** To enhance the communication capacity in the Greater Boston metropolitan area during response to health emergencies and disasters.

- Improve notification and provide situational awareness during health emergencies among 5 health and public health disciplines

**Partners**
- 69 Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
- 28 Hospitals
- 37 Community Health Centers (CHCs)
- 230 Long-term care facilities (LTCFs)
- 62 local public health agencies (LPHAs)
- Mass Dept of Public Health (MA DPH)
PEER Communities

- 2.2 million people
- 62 cities and towns
- Preparedness Regions 4A, 4B, and 4C.
Goals of PEER

1. Strengthen collaborations among 5 health disciplines and expand existing relationships to form inter-regional emergency response network;

2. Develop policies and protocols to ensure timely, consistent, and reliable communication of critical information within and across regions and disciplines;

3. Improve communication and enhance situational awareness through the addition of technologies to facilitate information sharing;

4. Develop a curriculum and provide training in communication protocols and technology for project partners;

5. Conduct a cross-disciplinary, inter-regional exercise to test protocols and enhanced technology.

6. Conduct comprehensive evaluation of all aspects of the PEER program activities.
Challenges Facing PEER

– Not all disciplines had worked together
– Differences in experience with emergency preparedness planning
– Differences in stages of preparedness planning
– Differences in terminology across disciplines
– Lack of specified protocols and procedures for communication during emergencies
– Differences in resources across regions
Key Focus

Strengthen regional partnerships through:

– Collaborative development of communication protocols and systems

– Expansion of mutual aid agreements

– Training to increase response capacity for an emergency.

Identified need for Coalition Building!
Initial PEER Approach

- Conference calls, newsletters, annual meetings
- Quarterly in-person meetings to Review progress
- At least monthly meetings to Plan, develop, review and revise
- Project Management, communication w/ partners, consultants, project officer

PEER Partners
- 69 EMS, 28 Hospitals, 37 CHCs, 230 LTCF, 62 LPHAs, Mass Dept of Public Health

PEER Governing Council
- Representatives from each of 5 disciplines
- In each of 3 regions + Member organization leads

Executive Committee
- Select representatives From disciplines

Boston University Staff
Coalitions: Definitions & Frameworks

“An organization of individuals representing diverse organizations, factions or constituencies who agree to work together in order to achieve a common goal.” ~ Feighert and Rogers, 1984: 1

“Open-Systems Framework” as a Model of Coalition Viability (Prestby and Wandersman, 1985)
Key Components of Effective Coalitions

- **Goals**
  - Short-term changes
  - Larger Impact
  - Institutionalization

- **Activities**
  - Target
  - Maintenance

- **Resources**
  - Funding
  - Members
  - Support

- **Organization**
  - Leadership
  - Clarity of Roles and Procedures
  - Decision-Making
  - Communication
  - Commitment

**Effective Coalitions**
How we used the Coalition Framework for Evaluation

- Framework for mid-project assessment
- Guided development of qualitative questions
- Baseline and follow-up survey questions
- Structured observations of meetings
Mid-Point Assessment

Focus group with Peer staff

• Used components of coalition framework to identify strengths and gaps

• Distilled key issues
  – Developed “corrective action plan” with new strategy/plan, associated tasks, and persons responsible

• Shared findings with Executive Committee
Mid-Point Assessment

Examples of issues included:

• Unequal representation of all disciplines in decision-making bodies
• Role clarification of staff and consultants needed
• Communication on project activities not getting to “people on the ground”
• Need to communicate goals and accomplishments
Qualitative questions

Qualitative interviews conducted with a sample of participants in pilot exercise

Example of questions include:

- Changes in communication and collaboration within your discipline
- Changes in collaboration and collaboration across the five disciplines
- Degree to which participants felt part of a collaborative effort to improve communication among health disciplines?
- Recommendations for maintaining the collaboration among 5 disciplines & keeping everyone working together
Baseline and follow-up survey questions

Semi-structured surveys sent via email to all PEER partners at beginning of project and follow-ups to those who completed baseline

- Identification of member resources
- Perceptions of leadership for PEER
- Clarity on understanding of PEER, roles and responsibilities
- Assessment of goals and objectives
- Strategies for coalition-building
Structured observations of meetings

Notes taken of all PEER meetings

- Partners present (diversity in disciplines and regions)
- Active participation in meetings
- Decision-making processes
- Strategies for resolving conflict
- Strategies for communicating decisions
- Plan for sustainability
Benefits of Using a Framework for Evaluating Coalition Building

Evaluation of coalition-building efforts are critical to overall evaluation of a project

- The “Open Systems” framework provided structure and theory to our evaluation
- Framework can be useful across methods
- Helped generate constructive feedback on sensitive issues
- Useful for obtaining information for on-going quality improvement
For More Information…

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