STRENGTHENING ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION MODULE

Strategies for Community-Centric Resilience Planning

PURPOSE

This module equips community leaders, Extension professionals, and partners to strengthen community participation in resilience planning by identifying barriers, expanding access, and creating meaningful opportunities for people affected by local challenges to help shape solutions.

Core Principle: Community resilience is stronger when planning is accessible, locally informed, and shaped by people who experience community challenges firsthand.

Outcome: Participants will identify groups affected by local risks and disruptions, understand barriers to participation, and design accessible engagement strategies that strengthen community resilience.

WHAT ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION MEANS IN PRACTICE

Accessible participation means: - Recognizing that local risks and disruptions affect people differently - Identifying practical barriers to participation - Creating realistic ways for community members to contribute

Community-centered participation means: - Reaching beyond the people who usually attend - Creating accessible and welcoming opportunities to participate - Valuing local knowledge and lived experience alongside technical expertise

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WHY IT MATTERS

Community risks and disruptions can affect people differently based on location, access to transportation and services, income, age, housing, communication access, and other local circumstances.

Without broad and accessible participation: - Plans may miss practical needs - Important local knowledge can be overlooked - Trust and community support may weaken

With accessible, community-centered planning: - Solutions are more locally relevant and practical - Community trust and participation increase - Long-term resilience is strengthened

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SECTION 1: IDENTIFYING WHO IS AFFECTED AND WHO NEEDS TO BE ENGAGED

FACILITATED ACTIVITY (30–45 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions: - Ask participants to identify people and groups affected by local risks, disruptions, or community challenges - Consider who may face practical barriers to receiving information, accessing resources, or participating in planning

Prompt Questions:

- Who may be most affected by local risks or disruptions?
- Who may have difficulty accessing information, services, transportation, or other resources?
- Who is not usually represented in community planning conversations?

WORKSHEET 1: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION & ACCESS

Community Group	Local Risks / Challenges	Barriers to Participation	Current Representation

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SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS

COMMON BARRIERS

- Language and communication gaps
- Transportation challenges
- Lack of childcare
- Time constraints (work schedules)
- Distrust of institutions
- Lack of compensation for participation

WORKSHEET 2: BARRIER ANALYSIS

Community Group	Barrier	Root Cause	Potential Solution

SECTION 3: DESIGNING ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES THAT WORK

1. Partner with Trusted Leaders

- Work through community-based organizations
- Engage faith leaders, local advocates, and informal influencers

2. Remove Participation Barriers

- Provide translation services
- Offer childcare and transportation support
- Schedule meetings at accessible times

3. Support Participation When Possible

- Consider stipends, incentives, or other participation support when appropriate and feasible
- Recognize community expertise as valuable

4. Meet Communities Where They Are

- Host events in community spaces
- Attend existing gatherings instead of creating new ones

WORKSHEET 3: ACCESSIBLE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Strategy	Community Group	Action Steps	Who Leads	Timeline

SECTION 4: PARTICIPATION & DECISION-MAKING

KEY QUESTION:

Who is participating in decisions—and whose local knowledge or experience may be missing?

WORKSHEET 4: PARTICIPATION MAPPING

Group	Level of Influence (High/Med/Low)	Level of Impact (High/Med/Low)	Participation Gap

Facilitator Insight: The goal is to understand who is affected, who is participating, and where additional outreach or access may strengthen the planning process.

SECTION 5: FACILITATED ACTIVITY – ACCESS IN ACTION

Scenario Exercise (30 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions: Present a community resilience project (e.g., emergency communication plan, neighborhood preparedness effort, infrastructure improvement, or community resource program) and ask:

- Who would benefit from this project?
- Who might have difficulty accessing or participating in it?
- What practical changes could make the project more accessible and useful to the community?

SECTION 6: FACILITATOR GUIDANCE – WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

Do This:

- Build long-term relationships with communities
- Listen before proposing solutions
- Be transparent about decision-making
- Create clear and meaningful opportunities for community input in decisions

Avoid This:

- Inviting people only to demonstrate participation without giving their input a meaningful role
- Assuming one meeting provides enough community input
- Over-relying on formal leaders only
- Ignoring local history, past experiences, or trust concerns

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SECTION 7: REFLECTION

Reflection Questions

- Whose perspective or experience may still be missing from this process?
- Are we addressing practical barriers to participation?
- Does this process build trust and make participation easier?

ACTION COMMITMENT

Within the next 30 days, we will:

SECTION 8: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Community Resilience & Participation

- Asset-Based Community Development Institute. *Strength-based approaches for identifying and building on community assets* https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute

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Accessible Engagement & Community Participation

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). *Resources and frameworks for effective public participation* https://iap2.org
- National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation. *Facilitation tools for community conversations and public engagement* https://ncdd.org

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Community Engagement Tools

- ADA.gov. *Guidance on accessibility and effective communication for public programs and services* https://www.ada.gov
- Community Science. *Participatory research and community engagement strategies* https://communityscience.com

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FINAL NOTE

Accessible community participation is a core part of effective resilience planning.

Plans are stronger when people affected by local challenges have meaningful opportunities to share knowledge, identify needs, and help shape practical solutions.

Your role is to reduce barriers, build trust, broaden participation, and help connect community knowledge with local decision-making.

(End of Module)