

Are We Ready for a Disaster?

*Recommendations for Improving
Disaster Preparation of Limited English
Proficient Communities*



ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN
LEGAL CENTER



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A Tomás Rivera Policy Institute and
Asian Pacific American Legal Center Report

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The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) advances informed policy on key issues affecting Latino communities through objective and timely research contributing to the betterment of the nation.

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KEY FINDINGS

City personnel indicated that lack of bilingual personnel and resources for translations of written documents prevent them from adequately preparing LEP communities for disasters. Most cities had access to some printed disaster preparedness materials in Spanish, but very few had documents translated into Asian languages. Almost half of the city officials interviewed reported funding shortages that prevented them from employing bilingual staff and conducting outreach for preparedness education. Cities also reported not having the resources to conduct outreach in other languages for Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), which enable local community members to prepare for disasters.

Cities should be equipped with sufficient resources to conduct educational activities for disaster preparedness in all communities, including those with limited English proficiency. This is particularly crucial to providing effective services to Los Angeles County's API population, 66% of whom are born outside the United States and likely to have limited English-speaking capacity, as well as for Latinos², who make up the majority of the County's Limited English Proficient (LEP) population.¹ The provision of emergency response services that reflect the linguistic diversity among the API community is becoming increasingly salient as the county's API population grows over time: within Los Angeles County, APIs saw a growth rate of 35% from 1990 to 2000.ⁱⁱ Meanwhile, the number of Latinos in Los Angeles County grew during this same period by almost 900,000.ⁱⁱⁱ

Many cities do not have sufficient resources to effectively communicate with LEP communities during a disaster. Most cities employ bilingual first responders, but the linguistic capacity of first response personnel does not reflect the linguistic diversity of the population in cities with high proportions of Asian Pacific Islanders (API). City officials furthermore expressed that the number of Spanish-speaking first response personnel is not commensurate with need. In addition, while both county and city officials identified some available resources to broadcast emergency communications in languages other than English, there was no consistent plan for ensuring these messages would be broadcast in the necessary languages. Many cities stated they could only issue communications in English.

Most of the city officials interviewed (81%) identified lack of funding as a significant barrier to providing disaster services to LEP populations. Respondents emphasized how funding cuts presented them with significant challenges in preparing their communities for disasters. Many officials expressed that until these funding shortfalls are addressed, they will be unable to focus on the communication needs of any given community.

While few cities are able to disseminate warning information in other languages, many cities are prepared and willing to use ethnic media to spread this information. City officials expressed that the most efficient strategy was to broadcast primary messages in English, and then use non-English media and other networks of contacts to spread information. Most cities reported having some connections in LEP communities, yet they lack systematic lists of contact information.

Lack of trust in government officials presents a serious impediment to preparing LEP communities for a disaster. City officials expressed that the most efficient strategy was to broadcast primary messages in English, and then use non-English media and other networks of contacts to spread information. Most cities reported having some connections in LEP communities, yet they lack systematic lists of contact information.

Officials from several cities expressed that LEP individuals are often too focused on daily survival concerns to adequately prepare for a disaster. Working multiple jobs to make ends meet, LEP individuals can be too busy to learn how to prepare for a disaster, much less to put together a home emergency disaster kit. Furthermore, LEP individuals who hold multiple jobs are not likely to have the resources to adequately prepare themselves for a disaster.

2 The terms Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably to refer to individuals who trace their origin or ancestry to the Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Introduction and Objectives

Residents of Southern California face the risk of a catastrophic event. In the last decade, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) proclaimed 11 Major/Emergency Disaster Declarations in Southern California, including earthquakes, severe weather events, mud and debris flows, and wildland conflagrations.^{iv} Some communities are especially at risk in the face of these frightening events. Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations, which make up one-quarter of Los Angeles County, are more at risk due to communication difficulties both in preparing for disasters and in experiencing them. In light of this vulnerability, this report is a necessary follow-up to an earlier report released by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) called *Disaster Preparedness in Immigrant Communities: Lessons Learned from Recent Catastrophes and Their Relevance to Latino and Asian Communities in Southern California*. Our 2008 report drew on the key lessons learned in New Orleans' Hurricane Katrina of 2005 and the 1994 earthquake in Northridge. We were able to identify the main challenges affecting disaster relief agencies in preparing LEP communities for disasters and providing disaster response.

Given both the high probability of a large-scale disaster in the next 30 years in California, as well as the sheer size of immigrant and non-English speaking communities in the region, research is crucial to address Southern California's ability to provide disaster response services to LEP communities. The 2007 Working Group on California Earthquake Probabilities estimates a 67% probability of a magnitude 6.7 earthquake affecting Southern California in the next 30 years.^v A large-scale disaster could have potentially devastating consequences for the region: lives lost, families displaced, and economic hardship as a result of disruption and property damage. A simulation of an earthquake of a magnitude of 7.8 along the southern San Andreas Fault in southern California estimated that such an earthquake likely would result in 1,800 deaths and 50,000 injuries requiring medical treatment. This study, by the U.S. Geological Survey, also estimated that such an earthquake would have far-reaching economic consequences for Southern California, totaling \$213 billion.^{vi} Study authors noted, "A major earthquake in Southern California is inevitable, and it will be a regional disaster. ... Whether or not the disaster becomes a catastrophe... depends on the choices that every person makes."^{vii}

Therefore, to mitigate the potential negative impacts of the next disaster, it is crucial that residents in the region embrace disaster planning and preparation efforts. Disaster planning must involve informing communities of steps to ensure their survival in a disaster and its immediate aftermath. Individuals and families should learn how to develop "disaster kits" for at home, work and in their vehicles with items such as water and food rations. Families need to be encouraged to create a family plan to help members identify agreed-upon actions to seek shelter and become reunited in the event of a disaster. Furthermore, state and local agencies should work together ahead of time to ensure that any response to a disaster is rapid and effective.

With more than one-quarter of the residents in Los Angeles County—more than 2.5 million people—considered Limited English Proficient (LEP)^{viii}, it is essential to analyze to what extent disaster preparedness takes into account the needs of these diverse communities. Within the 88 cities in Los Angeles County, 35 are made up of more than 25% LEP populations, and six cities are populated by more than 50% LEP communities.^{ix} These high proportions demonstrate the importance of examining whether disaster preparation takes into account the ability to communicate with these limited-English speaking communities. To that end, disaster preparedness agencies should ensure that all members of a community can understand and access educational efforts aimed at helping communities prepare. During a disaster, local, county, and state agencies will respond to protect life, the environment, and property. These agencies will provide emergency messages, assist communities through search and rescue missions, aid with evacuations and, after a disaster, develop services to help communities return to their homes and apply for assistance for replacement of lost property or resettlement. If more than 25% of residents in Los Angeles County cannot understand instructions given during and following an emergency, they will not be able to participate in these critical and restorative activities.

resources for disaster preparedness education, disaster planning in connection with LEP communities, language capacity among Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), emergency communications and disaster warning messaging, outreach and relationships to LEP communities, and language assistance for evacuation shelters and recovery programs. We also asked interview contacts to assess their greatest needs in terms of preparing LEP communities for disasters or providing emergency response to those communities, as well as recommendations to improve current disaster services. We used a consistent protocol with identical questions, but also conducted the interviews with a flexible approach, allowing us to ask follow-up questions to clarify answers or to omit questions when inappropriate or unnecessary. TRPI and APALC researchers conducted all interviews by phone. The table below shows the demographics of the survey respondents and the cities represented in the study. Of the 36 cities that were contacted, we were able to conduct interviews with officials from 22 cities, as well as with officials representing the two agencies responsible for disaster preparedness at the county level, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department’s Emergency Operations Bureau, and the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management.

TABLE 1. Characteristics of participating cities

CHARACTERISTIC	CATEGORY	RESPONDENTS (N=22)	PERCENT RESPONDED
City population	10,000 to 50,000	8	36%
	50,000 to 100,000	9	41%
	100,000 to 4,000,000	5	23%
City department of responding official	Emergency Management/ Preparedness	7	32%
	Police	3	13%
	Fire	5	23%
	Public Works/Safety	5	23%
	Other	2	9%
Designated official (Emergency Services Coordinator)	Yes	7	32%
	No	15	68%
% Limited English Proficient	25–34%	8	36%
	35–44%	7	32%
	45–54%	6	27%
	>55%	1	3%
Predominate language family of LEPs	Spanish	18	72%
	Asian Pacific Islanders (API)	4	18%

Key Findings

Disaster Preparedness Education

Many respondents identified preparedness as crucial, considering that in the event of an emergency, the emergency management community expects the population of Los Angeles County to be able to subsist without emergency response for at least 72 hours. Survey respondents, however, identified a lack of funding for translation and limited outreach capacity as the principal barriers in providing disaster preparedness education to LEP communities.

Cities do not have sufficient written disaster preparedness materials available in languages consistent with the needs of their populations.

Written disaster preparedness materials include brochures, preparedness guides, and pamphlets. These materials provide guidance for the population to assist in preparedness efforts, such as preparing a disaster kit, as well as give information about recommendations for action in the event of an emergency. While most cities have some or all of this information available on their website, pamphlets and brochures can be useful for cities to distribute during public events. Because they do not require Internet access and serve as a visual reminder of the need for preparedness, written materials can make disaster preparedness information accessible to LEP communities.

In the focus groups conducted for the original study with members of LEP communities, all groups interviewed recommended bilingual pamphlets as a means to inform community members of disaster preparedness. Most cities (19 of 21) stated that they have printed disaster preparedness materials in languages other than English available for distribution, but many expressed that they did not have sufficient written materials reflective of the demographics of their populations. Most cities had materials in the languages most commonly spoken in their area with Spanish being the most prevalent (15 out of the 21 cities provide bilingual materials in Spanish and English). Few cities provide materials in Asian languages, even in cities where Asian Pacific Islanders (API) comprise a very high proportion of the total population. Of the five participating cities where the API population exceeds 25% of the total population, four reported having materials in Asian languages, and two of those cities expressed that quantities were “limited.” Furthermore, the written materials offered in Asian languages do not likely reflect the diversity of Asian languages spoken in those cities. Three of those cities provide materials in Chinese (few officials indicated whether they are written in Mandarin or Cantonese), and one city provides materials in Korean and Chinese. In addition, several cities expressed concern that they did not have fliers or pamphlets in less commonly spoken languages such as Farsi, Arabic, or Hindi. Although several respondents identified a need for more written preparedness materials in other languages, the biggest obstacle identified was the lack of funding for translation and printing. As one official described, “We are working right now on a very tight budget. We’re trying to just survive day to day with the funding that we have, which doesn’t leave us any room to develop additional resources.”

Lack of funding inhibits many cities from obtaining printed materials in other languages; still officials from Los Angeles County indicated that they recently had received a grant to translate nine documents into 12 languages. These documents would be available electronically for printing as needed. One document series, the County’s annual “Emergency Survival Guide,” a comprehensive electronic resource for Los Angeles emergency managers to use in education efforts, contains a breadth of visual information and symbols that are accessible to many communities. The Office of Emergency Management reported that this guide is also available in Spanish, and, depending on funding, they plan to translate it into other languages as well. In addition, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health also has five emergency preparedness publications available on their website in 12 different languages, although no cities mentioned using those resources for distribution. Therefore, in addition to lacking resources for translation of materials, many city officials appeared to be unaware of existing available resources.

Cities conduct only limited targeted outreach for LEP communities.

Providing written materials such as brochures in other languages is an important first step in making disaster preparedness information accessible to LEP communities, but outreach efforts and educational campaigns are essential in order to ensure that these materials reach these populations. Here, a smaller proportion of cities were able to conduct outreach in LEP communities to provide information about disaster preparedness. Ten cities interviewed were able to provide translation or conduct activities such as presentations in other languages; this was done mainly on an ad hoc basis. One city official described translation for public events: “In the past, if we have a number of Spanish speakers at a community meeting, we’ll see if there’s someone there who can translate.” Other cities employ personnel with language capacity, which enables translation; as one city official explained, “Most of our staff is bilingual, so we are able to conduct the talks in Spanish if anyone needs it.”

As for outreach, only four cities reported specifically targeting LEP communities in their outreach efforts by going through local community groups, schools, and other organizations. Many cities expressed that with a majority LEP population, any general public education or outreach activities would reach the LEP communities. As one official explained, “Our city is probably 98% Latino, so when we conduct outreach in the community at large, we know we reach them.” On the other hand, one official described how he perceived a weakness in the city’s current efforts to reach out to Latino communities:

“As a Latino, I know that both in my own city and the city where I live, resources are not being utilized to reach out to Latinos. I’ve seen very little information available in Spanish about preparedness, not in Spanish media, or that which is being put out by disaster preparedness agencies. We need to be more proactive in reaching out to that community.”

While almost half of cities had bilingual personnel who could assist with translation of presentations, a very small number made an effort to reach out specifically to LEP communities.

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Very few cities provide CERT trainings in other languages.

Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) are teams of community members trained by the local emergency services agency. Originally developed by the Los Angeles Fire Department, FEMA has since adopted this program and has encouraged communities nationwide to participate. Participants receive training in disaster preparedness response, enabling them to assist themselves and other community members in the event of an emergency. CERT programs can be an effective way to ensure that community members are prepared and can spread disaster preparedness information in their communities; for this reason, the survey asked respondents about the accessibility of CERT trainings to members of LEP communities. Fewer than half of the respondents (nine cities) mentioned that their cities had a CERT program. Of those, only two provided trainings in Spanish, and two others reported residents receiving trainings in Spanish from Los Angeles County sponsored programs. All cities with CERT programs reported that they did not specifically target LEP populations for recruitment. One official explained the paradox in trying to recruit LEP communities for CERT without offering CERT trainings in other languages: “We don’t specifically target non-English speakers because we can’t offer trainings in other languages, but until we have non-English speakers signed up, there won’t be a need for trainings in Spanish or other languages.” Two cities with CERT programs expressed a need to provide bilingual training sessions, but explained that they faced constraints due to funding. As one official described, “There is definitely a need for trainings in Spanish here, but we haven’t been able to offer them because of lack of resources. Actually, all of our CERT activities have been put on hold due to budget cuts.” While the Citizen’s Corps’ website offers at no cost all related training materials for the CERT program in Spanish, respondents did not mention utilizing this resource, suggesting again that lack of awareness about existing resources keep cities from utilizing means to communicate with LEP communities.

Concern about a lack of funding for overall disaster preparedness activities echoed throughout the interviews, with many cities identifying CERT programs as one of the first programs to be cut. Two cities without CERT teams reported that although they considered these teams valuable and hoped to develop them, they were unable to offer trainings at all for lack of funding.

Although many cities employ bilingual first responders, the survey revealed that they do not necessarily employ sufficient responders to meet a city's needs, particularly for Asian and less common languages. For example, an official in one city where more than 20% of the LEP population speaks an Asian or Pacific Islander language reported only employing Spanish- and English-speaking first responders; an official in another city where more than 20% of the population is LEP and speakers of API languages reported being unsure whether first responders spoke any API languages. Another city greater than 50% LEP and primarily Spanish-speaking reported having only some Spanish-speaking officers, leaving doubt as to how the proportion can respond to the need. One official commented that their first responders did not have sufficient speakers of some languages spoken, including Arabic, in their city's LEP population. While several officials admitted deficiencies with regards to language capacity among first responders, at least three cities on the other hand mentioned that the first responders "reflected the diversity of the population of the city" or that "there were sufficient languages spoken relative to need." Several cities noted that bilingual personnel are paid a premium for language ability, which respondents noted serves as an incentive for those individuals to become involved in disaster preparedness, facilitating recruitment of bilingual personnel. Overall, there was some variation of the information provided by respondents about the language capacity of first responders relative to the needs of the population, but in general the surveys revealed that in many cities, first responders do not possess language capacity reflective of the diversity of languages spoken in their community.

Many cities report that absent of a fast and practical method for language assistance, first responders seek community members to serve as translators.

Many officials expressed that translation services would be impractical in an emergency situation. For example, some cities reported that other bilingual city officials could provide translation if necessary, but that first responders rarely contacted them for translation. Officials described how in a rapid-paced emergency, first responders do not have the time to use translation services. One respondent explained, "Even when they [first responders] have some way of dialing up and using a translation service, they don't use it. In that situation, you're trying to save someone's life, you can usually gesture, or find someone who speaks enough English to help you, much faster than you can expect to use a service like that." Officials described how, supported by findings in our first report, first responders will look for nearby people who can translate, who are often family members or children of a person needing assistance. Relying on children to translate sensitive or important information can lead to erroneous treatment and place an undue burden on the children involved. The lack of a systematic method of communication with speakers of languages other than English shows how improving communication capacity among first responders still presents a challenge for cities in Los Angeles County.

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Language assistance tools and training may be more practical than hiring more bilingual first responders.

In addition to hiring bilingual responders or providing them with translation services, other tools emerged as a potential solution to aid communication. Some officials expressed the view that it is impractical to expect a city to hire first responders fluent in all of the languages spoken in a given city and more realistic to identify tools that can assist first responders with communication, including flip charts or other easily accessible translation devices. One respondent indicated how some first responders had begun using Internet-enabled smart phones with translation applications, which provided more rapid translation than other known devices. Another respondent also indicated a need for cultural competency training for first responders, stating:

"First responders need information about what they're expected to do and how they're expected to react to different populations. If they don't understand cultural differences, it can affect their ability to communicate with the population and perform their duties."

Exploring tools to assist first responders with communication may be more realistic than hiring more bilingual first responders.

Most cities in Los Angeles County have limited capacity to broadcast emergency information in other languages.

Two main agencies are responsible for coordinating communications during an emergency: the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. In the event of an emergency, the OEM and the Sheriff's Department would activate the County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The EOC serves as the focal point of coordination of County personnel and resources for the disaster response and it serves to support the individual communities within Los Angeles. Additionally, the Sheriff's Department is responsible for issuing countywide emergency messages using the Emergency Alert System (EAS). Broadcast through different media outlets, these messages explain both the disaster situation and the government's response. Lastly, the Sheriff's Department is also responsible for Alert LA, a County service for residents to subscribe and receive telephone, email, or text messages in the event of an emergency in a particular neighborhood or area. OEM would coordinate messaging among agencies in the event of a disaster as well as transmit press releases to media outlets to spread emergency-related information.

County officials explained that they had the capacity to broadcast messages in other languages through multilingual personnel, as well as through access to translation services. Text messages sent through Alert LA could also be sent out in other languages if a target population had a large proportion of non-English speakers. An official explained, "If we know that a specific area needs speakers of a certain language, if we don't have personnel who speak that language that we can dispatch to that area, then we can usually get a translator." On the other hand, the official was unaware of whether the Emergency Alert System could broadcast messages in other languages, and an official from OEM stated that it probably could not. While the County has significant resources available to dispatch multilingual personnel, it appears that they may not have capacity to issue some warning messages in languages other than English.

In the event of an emergency, in addition to the uniform messaging broadcast by county agencies, individual cities would be responsible for transmitting emergency notifications to their residents through a variety of means. Cities reported issuing press releases to news agencies; using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and text messaging services; posting information on the city's website; sending e-mail alerts to listserves; going door to door or other person-to-person communications (such as using bullhorns); and the use of PA systems and public loudspeakers.

At the city level, few cities have the capacity to communicate messaging to their citizens in their languages. Of the 17 cities reporting that they would issue emergency communications, only seven cities reported the ability to record and broadcast information in Spanish, and four cities reported having pre-translated messages that they could use as templates during an emergency.

Many cities use ethnic media and other contacts to spread emergency information.

Rather than attempting to broadcast just-in-time emergency messages in the many different languages of Los Angeles County, many cities reported it is more practical to use other channels for communication, such as ethnic media and contacts with community organizations. Officials from OEM stated that primary emergency messaging from their department goes out in English, but they use contacts to re-transmit the information in other languages and more accessible formats. One network of contacts, the Emergency Network of Los Angeles (ENLA), presents an effective way to facilitate rapid communication as it is composed of representatives from a variety of community organizations, government institutions, and other groups involved in emergency management. As one official described:

"What we have is an elaborate phone tree. Although we would like to, it's just not possible for us to provide all of the messages in all of the different appropriate formats during an emergency. ... We couldn't possibly provide effective messaging in 13 different languages when we're scrambling to get it out in just one language. So what we need to do is to be strategic and foster relationships with different partner organizations who can

Most cities have extensive contacts with organizations working in the LEP community, but few have formalized systems of outreach to these organizations.

As case studies demonstrated, relationships between emergency services and community organizations can be key to preparing communities for disasters by enabling more expansive and inclusive distribution of information. Additionally, these organizations can play a role in providing disaster response, as they can help disseminate instructions and information to their communities. One identified effective practice was for cities to employ liaisons that work on an ongoing basis to build relationships with a given community. This allows government agencies to communicate more effectively with communities during a disaster. As described above, community organizations play a crucial role in LA County's plan for emergency messaging; on the county level, Los Angeles Emergency Management Office maintains relationships with a number of organizations working with immigrants and the LEP community. Among the cities, none had a formal immigrant community liaison position, but most cities did report maintaining contacts in the LEP community. Of the 22 cities reporting they did not work with a community liaison, almost half (10) reported they had contacts with the LEP community, two reported specific outreach to LEP communities wasn't necessary given the demographics of the city, and four cities reported other city departments (such as Community Services) were in charge of maintaining contacts. In a separate question asking specifically about outreach to organizations working with the LEP community, 19 cities reported maintaining contacts with these groups, including civic and cultural organizations, community organizations and clubs, Parent Teacher Associations, Neighborhood Watch groups, churches and faith-based organizations, and consulate offices. Therefore, most cities demonstrated connections to local organizations that can assist with communication with LEP communities, but these relationships seem to vary, and few cities have formalized channels to ensure communication either before a disaster or in the aftermath of a disaster.

All cities reported that disaster response is provided to residents regardless of immigration status.

In the focus group interviews with members of LEP communities conducted in the 2008 study, one issue emerged in all of the groups interviewed. There was the perception that undocumented immigrants could be denied access to emergency response services due to immigration status, or that fear of deportation may keep undocumented immigrants from coming into contact with law enforcement. In the interviews with City and County personnel, all respondents reported that regardless of immigration status, their agencies would provide disaster response to all residents. Many were emphatic that immigration status was not something that first responders take into account when providing disaster response. One official stated, "No, [questioning immigration status during disaster response] would be a nightmare! That would go against all of the values and principles that underlie law enforcement." On the other hand, officials from three cities mentioned that non-governmental institutions such as the Red Cross would most likely be operating evacuation shelters, and that they were not sure what Red Cross policies are regarding immigration status. Several officials mentioned concern that some LEP communities still may be fearful of seeking assistance, despite the fact that disaster response services are provided to residents regardless of immigration status. One official explained the need to further educate both the emergency management and LEP communities about the regulations for disaster response regarding immigration status:

"There's a general feeling of mistrust among a lot of members of the LEP community with regards to law enforcement, which is something that we really need to overcome, as these communities are often those with the greatest needs. Of course we need to do more outreach and education among the LEP population; we need to create positive relationships with law enforcement that we can build upon during an emergency. In my experience, even if immigrant communities know that they won't be questioned about their status, the fear is always in the back of their minds. We need to educate not just those populations but law enforcement itself and those of us in the emergency management community so it's clear to everyone what the rules are, when you can ask about status and when you can't."

"There's a general feeling of mistrust among a lot of members of the LEP community with regards to law enforcement, which is something that we really need to overcome, as these communities are often those with the greatest needs."

Although respondents unanimously declared that immigration status would not affect immigrants' access to evacuation shelters or other disaster response services, the persistent mistrust of law enforcement among many members of the LEP community points to the need for greater outreach, education, and relationship-building among these communities on a long-term, ongoing basis.

Greatest Needs

All respondents were asked to identify their greatest needs for both preparedness and response. For preparedness, participants reported needing increased outreach to LEP communities, greater access to LEP communities, better channels for communication, and increased training and staffing of bilingual personnel.

Increased outreach and access

Nine cities said that resources to increase outreach for LEP communities were necessary to improve preparedness among the LEP community. Three cities mentioned that identification of the language needs in their community would be an important first step in reaching out to these communities. Six cities reported the importance of building up contacts in the LEP community, including developing relationships with organizations and groups that work with the LEP community, and four mentioned that more frequent contact between the emergency management and LEP communities would improve communication. Several cities also shared that in reaching out to the LEP communities, they have encountered barriers that make communication and relationship-building difficult. One of these challenges was trust; two officials mentioned the difficulty of breaking down the barrier of mistrust of law enforcement that has been created in many LEP communities. As one official explained, "It's important to keep all possible avenues of communication open. We don't want people to feel intimidated or afraid of us, and sometimes that means we need to do a better job of reaching out to the people they trust in order to gain access to them." Another barrier that three cities identified was the apparent lack of information or confusion that many LEP communities have about emergency management and the types of services offered by cities' public safety departments. As one official explained, "We need to engage in more outreach and education not just about emergency preparedness, but about city services in general. Often people don't call us when they need to because they don't know how to call or who to call or when to call. These are the types of barriers that make it difficult for us to build a working relationship with the community." One official described how some resource barriers, such as lack of access to Internet, kept LEP communities from being involved: "We have to be aware of ways of contacting these communities other than just putting information up on our websites, as many of them don't use the Internet." Finally, several city officials also mentioned that LEP communities often did not seem interested or motivated to participate in preparedness activities. One official described frustration with previous attempts to reach out to LEP communities:

"Our biggest need is the communications factor. Even when we've done our best to disseminate information, we don't get any response from the LEP community. I don't know what the barrier is that keeps them from being involved, but if they do respond to us, then we can reach them, but it's much harder if they don't."

Several city officials explained that lack of motivation to engage in disaster preparedness activities was not unique to LEP communities and was in fact reflected in the community at large. One official explained:

"Our challenge is the same for English speakers, Korean speakers, Spanish speakers, everybody, which is to get people to understand how at risk for a disaster we are in Southern California. People need to understand that for the first 72 hours, they'd be on their own. Even if they do understand, a lot of people are living day to day, and it's difficult to demand that they stockpile food and water if they're worried about putting food on the table today."

"It's important to keep all possible avenues of communication open. We don't want people to feel intimidated or afraid of us, and sometimes that means we need to do a better job of reaching out to the people they trust in order to gain access to them."

“People in this town work a lot, often more than one full-time job, to try to make a living for themselves and support their families. They simply don’t have time to go to a talk on emergency preparedness or to put together a family plan.”

Another official also echoed the concern that lack of resources among low-income communities kept them from taking some of the necessary steps to be prepared for a disaster. In the focus group interviews conducted in the first study, some members of LEP communities discussed the need for low-cost preparedness kits, but others stated that the cost of disaster kits was not a barrier to preparing them. One official described how it was time, rather than financial resources, that kept community members from being involved in community activities, “People in this town work a lot, often more than one full-time job, to try to make a living for themselves and support their families. They simply don’t have time to go to a talk on emergency preparedness or to put together a family plan.” Another mentioned how this obstacle forced their agency to be creative, “We know that we’re not going to get people taking time out of their busy schedule to attend one of our events, so we try to go to community events where those communities are likely to be going anyway, at night or during the weekends.” City officials identified resources to conduct outreach activities as one of their greatest needs, and admitted that distrust of law enforcement and lack of motivation were key barriers to accessing LEP communities.

Improved communications capacity

The other need most commonly identified by participants was for resources to improve multilingual capacity among city emergency management offices. Possible means included the hiring and training of more bilingual personnel, access to written materials in other languages, hiring of community liaisons, access to translation services (particularly for less commonly spoken languages), development of CERT programs, and increased contact with non-English speaking media and community organizations. As one official explained:

“We need to develop resources specifically designated for the Latino community. As it is now, we don’t have any bilingual personnel assigned to conduct public education with Spanish speakers, which means if we’re giving a presentation to a Spanish-speaking group, we have to scramble to find the speakers we need. We could probably do a better job of preparing in advance for those needs.”

One official expressed concern that they had few resources to provide information in many languages, stating:

“We have a lot of materials in Spanish and a lot of Spanish speakers on hand. We only have materials in a few of the Asian languages, though, and there are some languages that we don’t have any materials for at all, nor personnel that speaks those languages. That means there are many communities we’re just not reaching at all.”

Overall disaster preparedness resources

Throughout the interviews, many officials expressed concern that their overall budgets were being cut, and that disaster preparedness was not a priority for city councils making difficult funding decisions. Given these financial realities, many officials expressed that many such improvements would not be realistic to expect in the near future. As one official stated:

“For any improvement we’d like to make, we’d need funding, more resources. My disaster preparedness budget is being cut all of the time; now it’s just me, and just one of my responsibilities. I don’t know where I could find time or resources to do anything more than I’m doing.”

Disaster response

The most common need identified by survey respondents in terms of disaster response was to increase language capacity among disaster response personnel, including first responders as well as officials in the emergency management community. Survey respondents also identified what they need to improve communications: multilingual emergency communications capacity as an essential need to improve disaster response to LEP communities, as well as access to translation systems, development of pre-translated template messages, and contacts with the ethnic media. Finally, two cities mentioned the need to develop contacts with the LEP community and build trust within these communities, which would enable first responders to respond more effectively. Representatives from several cities described how preparedness is essential to disaster response, as prepared communities will be more knowledgeable about appropriate steps to take during an emergency and will have the necessary supplies on hand to survive while waiting for first responders. One official commented:

“I’d say we face the same needs for response as we do with preparedness, which is resources to be able to reach the immigrant communities. For example, I do a lot of presentations about what to do during and after a disaster, and I’d love to be able to do those in Spanish. If people are prepared for a disaster, it makes response that much easier.”

As with preparedness, many respondents emphasized the overall budget constraints they faced. As one respondent indicated, “Our greatest need [for disaster response] isn’t just about LEP communities but for the whole community; we need to have more resources to be able to provide basic supplies to people for a few days in the aftermath of an emergency.” Many officials expressed that obtaining the resources to ensure effective disaster response for the whole community would help ensure disaster response for LEP communities.

Funding and resources

All survey respondents were asked what changes or improvements they would make with additional resources for both preparedness and response to make these services more accessible to the LEP community. The primary changes they suggested are as follows:

- **Increased outreach to LEP communities**

Five cities responded that they would increase outreach and undertake efforts to build a trusting relationship with the LEP community in question. As one officer described:

“We’ve had difficulty in the past with outreach, not just to the LEP community, but in general. There seems to be a lack of interest in preparing until a disaster strikes, and then it’s too late. The key is to provide a consistent message, and for LEP communities, that means making the message available to them in their language, and using staff that speaks their language so they feel comfortable going to those sessions or asking questions. It’s difficult to get English speakers engaged in preparedness, but even more difficult if we’re trying to get non-English speakers involved without personnel who speaks their language or knows their communities.”

Another official explained that “it would be nice to have in the budget an office specifically assigned to building relationships in the Latino community,” similar to the community liaison idea discussed earlier. Additionally, two cities mentioned that resources to recruit LEP members for CERT programs, including resources to establish more training materials in other languages, would be beneficial to prepare those communities for disasters.

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- **Hire and train bilingual personnel**

Three cities responded that they would hire additional bilingual and multilingual personnel if given additional resources, and two cities mentioned the importance of training existing personnel to be prepared to offer assistance to LEP communities. One respondent described how “one of the largest costs in disaster preparedness is in paying for the training and preparation of personnel.” Another official described how preparing first responders is essential to ensuring that disaster response accounts for the needs of LEP communities:

“Preparedness for the community at large is important, but it’s also important to prepare first responders for encounters with LEP communities. They need the most tools we can give them to help with translation, whether they are flip cards, hand-held translators, or access to translation systems; but they also need training on what to expect and how to react when providing response in communities with different cultural traditions or expectations.”

- **Translation of written materials into other languages**

Respondents from four cities expressed the importance of obtaining printed materials translated into other languages to assist with preparedness efforts. One respondent suggested as a minimum first step that all major publications be available in the seven languages in which Los Angeles provides translated ballots and voter assistance (Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, and Vietnamese). One official described how “rather than printing out these publications in all of these languages, we should have an electronic copy available so we can print them out when we need it, or be able to order printed copies. We’ve learned in the past that ordering a bunch of documents usually results in some just gathering dust.” One official also described how most of their materials came from the American Red Cross or Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and they would like to be able to disseminate documents that are more specific to their particular city. Another official described how translation of documents was important, but the city first needed to better assess the language needs of their community. The official declared that the 2010 Census would be essential to this analysis. Finally, several officials noted that outreach efforts are essential to ensure that LEP communities receive printed materials.

- **Improved access to translation for emergency communications**

Four cities described the importance of the ability to disseminate emergency warnings and disaster-related information in languages other than English. One official suggested that dissemination methods be tested in advance, with public information officers consolidating contacts and testing out networks for communication. Similarly, one official described how preparing contacts in the non-English media was important to ensure that emergency management officials were prepared to utilize those contacts during an emergency. Two officials mentioned the need to explore new methods of disseminating information, including sending out mass texts of information in other languages or calling cell phones. One official also responded that it would improve emergency communications to have “more people readily available to act as translators, either as volunteers or paid personnel.”

- **Subsidize disaster kits**

Two officials described how the principle obstacle to preparing disaster kits for many communities, including those with LEP, lay in their lack of funds to set aside for the kits, therefore describing how providing those kits either free or at a low cost to families would help make disaster preparedness a more realistic expectation for those cities. One contact described the predicament in asking low-income families to set aside funds to make a disaster kit:

“I’ve been working on outreach for a long time, and I don’t have a problem getting people to come to my presentations, and I speak Spanish, so I can communicate with Spanish speakers. To me, the biggest barrier is the cost of preparing a kit, which can be overwhelming for a low-income family. If we could help them get started, we’d go a long way towards making sure they’re prepared for disasters.”

Another official described what they perceived as a past successful partnership that provided 500 kits for free to community residents, including items that residents would not be likely to use unless they were in an emergency situation (such as glowsticks rather than flashlights), to ensure that these kits would be available during an emergency.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Los Angeles County is an area particularly prone to disasters such as earthquakes and wildfires; a catastrophic event could take a particularly devastating toll on LA County, an area with a highly concentrated population. Preparing residents for disasters ensures that they will know what to expect and how to survive if disaster response services are not immediately available. Preparedness at levels of this region enables the districts within to ensure that a disaster response is both efficient and effective. In 36 cities in Los Angeles County, 25 percent or more of residents are Limited English Proficient (LEP). Taking the needs of these populations into account in planning both disaster preparedness education and disaster response is essential to ensuring that in the event of a disaster, these communities are prepared with basic supplies and a family plan, and that they are able to understand and follow instructions given by emergency response agencies.

Interviews with officials in the emergency preparedness community in Los Angeles revealed that while cities with a significant portion of Limited English Proficient (LEP) speakers were taking many steps to prepare those communities for disasters, these cities faced significant limitations due to funding and lack of resources. Based on these findings, TRPI and APALC offer the following recommendations:

Ensure adequate funding for emergency preparedness education

Throughout the interviews, city officials commented that funding shortfalls prevent them from sufficiently engaging in emergency preparedness and planning activities. While funding for public programs is limited, especially during current fiscal constraints, the State of California, as well as municipalities, should strategically focus efforts on funding disaster preparedness to ensure that these programs are efficient and effective. One means of ensuring their effectiveness is to assess the accessibility and relevance of disaster preparedness efforts to LEP communities in areas such as Los Angeles County, where these communities make up a large portion of the overall population. To ensure adequate funding sources, we recommend:

- Cities should seek public-private partnerships with local businesses to develop resources for improvements to disaster preparedness efforts, as well as to involve the local community in planning for disasters. Several examples of successful public-private partnerships include: the New York City’s Public-Private Emergency Planning Initiative, in which the city’s Office of Emergency Management helps businesses plan for disaster and share information^x; or Chicago First, a membership association of businesses in the financial sector which work with local and federal emergency management agencies to develop information sharing technologies and assist with the drills and simulation exercises^{xi}. King County, Washington’s “3 Days, 3 Ways, Are You Ready?” preparedness program demonstrates a particular creative use of public and private resources for disaster preparedness. This program brought together the King County Office of Emergency Management, the local radio station KOMO, the Seattle Mariners, the American Red Cross (ARC) and Phillips Medical Systems for a broad emergency preparedness campaign that used publicity aired on the radio station, free giveaways of disaster preparedness kits donated by Phillips and ARC at Mariners’ baseball games, and disaster preparedness booths and advertisement at Mariners’ home games to inform the public about disaster preparedness^{xii}.

- The State of California should prioritize funding for disaster preparedness programs, even during this time of fiscal constraints. One official interviewed noted that the metropolitan area of Los Angeles possesses considerably fewer resources for emergency management than other comparable urban areas in the United States. Disaster preparedness is more cost effective than shouldering the unnecessary costs of destruction enacted by a disaster when cities are unprepared^{xiii}, and the costs of short-sighted allocation of resources could be devastatingly high following a disaster. Furthermore, funding should include a portion earmarked for preparing LEP communities for disasters.

Ensure that outreach for disaster preparedness education is accessible to LEP communities, and that disaster planning takes the needs of these communities into account.

In order to prepare LEP communities for disasters, cities should have access to both written materials in languages spoken among LEP populations, as well as the capacity to conduct presentations and other educational activities in languages other than English. In addition, cities should build relationships with key organizations working with LEP communities to assist in disaster planning, ensuring that planning adequately addresses the needs of these crucial communities.

- Cities should conduct assessments of their current outreach to LEP communities and utilization of current low-cost resources, such as publications available from Los Angeles County agencies.
- The State of California Emergency Management Agency (CalEMA) or the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) should establish an electronic clearinghouse of essential printed materials translated into the key languages of communities in Los Angeles County so that individual cities can download and print according to need. These agencies should conduct outreach with local agencies to ensure that these resources are being utilized.

Each city should have access to low-cost disaster kits for distribution during emergency preparedness education activities to low-income communities. Many city officials noted that income presents a barrier to engagement in preparedness activities for many members of their communities.

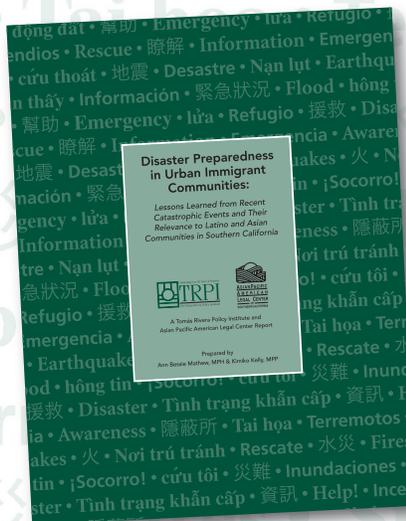
- Amend the California's Emergency Services Act to require cities with 25% or more population LEP to develop an outreach plan to develop contacts with those communities, including ethnic media and faith- and community-based organizations. Each city should specify in their plan how these contacts will be utilized to assist with dissemination of materials for preparedness, as well as to assist with communications in the event of a disaster. The State of California should designate resources specifically for community outreach among disaster management agencies.
- To help bolster citizen programs that are crucial to ensuring community emergency preparedness, further funds should be earmarked within the State Homeland Security Program (SHSP), the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI), and Citizen Corps Program (CCP) to allow cities to develop CERT programs and recruit Citizen Corps volunteers, as well as to develop trainings in relevant languages. Cities should coordinate outreach activities to ensure that LEP community members are aware of these programs and are encouraged to participate.

Ensure that cities are equipped to communicate effectively with LEP communities in the event of a disaster.

Many cities experience resource limitations that hinder their ability to communicate effectively with LEP communities in the event of a disaster. Programs should be developed that address these shortcomings by increasing language capacity for emergency communications and notifications, as well as by increasing this capacity among first responders in relevant communities.

- Cities with substantial LEP communities should prioritize seeking grant funding to provide first responders with the essential tools to assist in providing response to LEP communities, including training on responding to LEP populations, flip cards, and if possible, hand-held translation devices or access to translation services.
- The Emergency Management Program Grant program should incentivize cities to actively recruit multi-lingual emergency management personnel and first responders.
- The State of California should designate funding to allow Los Angeles County to utilize mass notification systems in a basic number of languages, and to develop protocols for utilizing contacts in the ethnic media, community organizations, and other institutions with the capacity to translate messaging to LEP communities.

Major catastrophic events in urban areas will cause untold pain and suffering in both physical and emotional terms. Southern California, resting on a myriad number of earthquake fault lines, subject to fire that can burn through thousands of acres, and even as a potential victim of terrorist actions, can be a leader in establishing disaster preparedness in the multiplicity of ethnic communities that constitute this region.



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