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Evaluation of Unmet Needs of Vulnerable Populations and At-Risk Communities Through Disaster Management Planning

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, American Military University, 2021

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Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

This community-based non-profit organization aimed to aid those most in need by providing critical social services. The client organization has been selected numerous times as a recipient of federal disaster case management programs, often not until a year after the disaster, resulting in distrust of the federal government and organizations contracted to perform recovery services. Providing services to areas impacted has been difficult due to contract delays. The practice research question addressed in this study was: How can a client organization address the one-year service gap frequently associated with federal contracts through a disaster management planning system? The purpose of this qualitative study was to equip the client organization with a post-disaster needs assessment and disaster recovery plan by using a logic model, which was the primary deliverable, that can be used to evaluate and address unmet needs among vulnerable populations. Data collection consisted of 15 participants, which included 10 surveys and five in-person and virtual interviews with emergency management practitioners. Analytical techniques included creating themes that were identified during transcription, and analysis was conducted through triangulation. Findings included that the client organization could address its service gap through procurement contracts, immediate disaster case management, fee-for-service, sponsorships, and volunteer disaster case management. This study contributes to public administration practice by providing methods to shorten recovery times. This project has the potential to promote positive social change by providing additional information related to the unmet needs of vulnerable populations and at-risk communities through future disaster planning.

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Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral research study to my family, friends, and current and future emergency management professionals who will continue challenging the status quo toward making communities nationwide more resilient and prepared for human-caused and natural disasters while providing a voice for those often forgotten.

Next, I would like to dedicate this study to every Community Emergency Response Team and Disaster Volunteer who continues to wear their heart on their sleeves while creating everlasting impact among many individuals and families that have lost so much. Your kindness, compassion, and purpose are the driving force behind aiding needy families and individuals to overcome adversity. Walking in your purpose of serving others and being a part of something bigger than yourself requires dedication and commitment.

Leadership is not a position or a title but a frame of mind. We all can promote positive social change while making a tangible impact within our communities. Emergency management is everchanging and challenging due to various social concerns. Protecting and serving the community for the public good requires ensuring their safety and security. Improving and maintaining the safety and well-being of a community requires leaders who can adapt, improvise, and overcome complex situations quickly.

Always remain a student of your craft. Being a knowledgeable emergency management professional can sometimes require stepping out of your comfort zone while not being discouraged to ask hard questions. Each disaster, crisis, and emergency is an opportunity to learn and adapt.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my profound appreciation to my Chair, Dr. Raj Singh, and Committee Member, Dr. Jullian Muhamad. Dr. Singh, your guidance and ongoing pursuit to aiding doctoral students in achieving academic success throughout their Walden University residencies and Professional Administrative Studies does not go unnoticed. I admire your leadership style of continuously pushing me toward completing goals promptly and efficiently. Your ongoing message that a good dissertation is finished has served me well. At the same time, I was being tested, trying to find the time to work on essential milestones within the doctoral program. Thank you for being patient kind, and providing ongoing mentorship. To my Walden University Academic Advisors, Bingh Nigh and James Williams, and all my university professors, thank you for guiding me toward earning this degree. Thank you for believing in me when debating whether I could make it through statistics. I would not have been able to overcome adversity consistently without you both.

To my mom, completing my Doctorate in Public Administration would not have been possible without your ongoing support. You have always told me that your goal as a mother was to watch all three of your kids get master's degrees, which we all have. I can proudly say this wish just got a lot better. Lastly, I thank my client organization for being transparent about its current needs and allowing me to address them. This dissertation results in everlasting community impact and positive social change amongst your clients. I can proudly say that I am now an agent of social change!

<u>Thank you, Walden University!!</u>

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Section 1: Introduction

Introduction

The client organization is a non-profit social service organization with a mission to provide supportive services to individuals and populations most in need. Over the last few years, many hardships have forced the organization to adapt to changes due to ongoing disasters in the area. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has played a critical role in the emergency management department within the organization. Increased frequency of disasters in the Pacific Northwest and prolonged approval times for FEMA disaster contracts can present significant challenges for the communities and populations the organization serves. Following a federally declared disaster, this community-based organization can be chosen as a recipient of Disaster Case Management. The Robert T. Stafford Act and Emergency Assistance Act of 1988 is a doctrine within the federal government that governs how the federal government will respond to natural disasters.

This doctrine has limitations, which include a complex and prolonged approval process. Although this emergency management policy has received improvement from the Disaster Reform Act, there are still critical pitfalls in the overall process. The complex and prolonged process of receiving FEMA contracts can directly affect our ability to achieve desired outcomes and our mission statement. As a non-profit, it often relies on grants and contracts to initiate or sustain critical disaster-related operations, including FEMA contracts. Often, they do not receive contracts until a year after the disaster, resulting in distrust of the federal government and organizations contracting with them to perform recovery services.

Delays also impede the ability to reach clients, as the disaster survivor list is kept confidential until contracts are fully executed. Contract delays can indirectly affect the recovery timelines of individuals, communities, and vulnerable populations. This organization has discovered that vulnerable populations and at-risk communities can often become most affected by a disaster due to critical service disruptions.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to equip the client organization with a post-disaster needs assessment and disaster recovery plan by utilizing a logic model that evaluates and addresses unmet needs amongst vulnerable populations and at-risk populations, mitigating the 1-year gap in service. This study is significant because this community-based organization was created to address unmet needs among at-risk communities and vulnerable populations.

The organization will use the study's findings to examine unmet individual and community needs. Identifying and addressing unmet needs following a natural disaster can be accomplished through the implementation of a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment and Disaster Recovery Framework during various phases of the recovery process. The delivered product will aid administrators in quickly and adequately evaluating the unmet needs of vulnerable populations and at-risk communities through disaster management planning. Identifying a community’s unmet needs can result in community empowerment and resiliency. Creating positive social change in emergency management can reduce short and long-term risks, resulting in limited loss of life and damage to the property and the environment.

Organization Background and Problem Statement

The client organization is a social service non-profit with a mission statement to aid individuals and communities most in need. This organization was founded in the nineteen eighties to provide critical supportive services to at-risk communities and vulnerable populations in various counties located in the Pacific Northwest. The organization's service region includes over eight counties in areas that are prone to natural disasters. Supportive services are within five specific causes: advocacy, housing, mental health and wellness, healthy habits, and raising future generations. Advocacy programs include Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Clothes that Work, Disaster Services, Enhanced Services for Asylees and Vulnerable Non-Citizens, Immigration Legal Services, and Promotores. The housing department under this organization commits to providing affordable housing for populations most in need. Currently, housing facilities are in widespread areas across the service region.

Mental health and wellness programs include counseling services, wellness and recovery centers, Juvenile Hall Groups, Talk Lines, and school-based counseling. Healthy living programs focus on improving the health of communities through nutrition education and physical education. Raising Future Generations programs offered by the client organization include Baby Steps, Healthy Families, Tapp Teen Services, Facilitating All Resources Effectively, and living programs and services. The governing body of this community-based organization has three authorities. The board of directors is the first authority, consisting of volunteers with various leadership positions. Leadership positions can include, but are not limited to, chair, treasurer, secretary, and vice president. Each position provides critical oversight of the mission and vision of the organization.

The board of directors is primarily responsible for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organization as well as the ongoing supervision of the executive director. The second authority is a Diocese located in the Pacific Northwest. The Roman Catholic Diocese within the region comprises member organizations and programs within twenty counties. Member organizations within this network are committed to serving socially disadvantaged, access, and functional needs, and populations that would be better off through our supportive services. The current Bishop works within the Office of the Bishop, who was appointed upon the retirement of the previously elected Bishop. The regional Bishop holds governance and authority over the executive director for the client organization. The bishop is also responsible for recruiting and providing guidance and support to the organization and the executive director through various funding platforms. The Diocese of this community-based organization region is populated by more than three million people. This region consists of over eight counties in the Pacific Northwest.

The problem statement that I analyzed in this study was how the client organization will evaluate unmet needs among vulnerable populations and at-risk communities by using a post-disaster needs assessment to address the 1-year gap in service often associated with obtaining federal emergency management contracts. Not being able to serve clients suffering financially due to additional hardships, placed on them due to unforeseen events caused by disasters, can be daunting. Without quick intervention, populations with a lower socioeconomic status can be more prone to being more vulnerable to not achieving their disaster recovery plans. Not being able to recover in the short and long term can lead to hopelessness and social withdrawal. Disaster relief organizations that can work with affected populations that would not be able to recover without intervention can mitigate long-term recovery challenges.

This can include, but is not limited to, mitigation of mental health stressors, suicidal ideations, adverse coping skills, depression, and the many challenges access and functional needs populations face daily. Disasters amplify hardships and barriers for those barely getting by. Without access to vehicles, grocery stores, critical infrastructure, and other social service organizations, many would not be able to survive. Due to urgency and increased frequency of disasters, the client organization requested that I address this administrative problem due to the importance of their mission statement.

Purpose

How can the client organization implement a disaster management planning system that evaluates the unmet needs of vulnerable populations and at-risk communities following a disaster and addresses the 1-year gap in service often associated with federal contracts to address such issues? The purpose of this qualitative study was to equip this community-based organization with a post-disaster needs assessment and disaster recovery plan by utilizing a logic model that evaluates and addresses unmet needs amongst vulnerable populations and at-risk populations, mitigating the 1-year gap in service, as stated by the executive director. Solving this service barrier within the Disaster Services Department will result in more clients being served while increasing the probability of achieving organizational, program, and community recovery goals.

Summary of Data Sources and Analysis

I collected qualitative data through surveys and interviews with various participants. Members of the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRG), and Unmet Needs Roundtables (UNR) are comprised of federal, state, and local organizations, including non-governmental organizations and faith-based organizations. Information gathered has been integrated into the community needs assessments, disaster recovery plans, and a logic model. The study employed a qualitative research design to address the research questions and resolve the current administrative issue. Data collected through surveys and interviews with participants provided data on the administrative problem for the client organization, as well as information on community readiness and resiliency. I created a logic model, a disaster needs assessment, and a disaster recovery plan to properly evaluate and address the administrative issue presented by the executive director and the leadership team from this social service non-profit organization.

I collected data through interviews and surveys with community stakeholders and organizations providing critical services before, during, and after a disaster. Their direct relationships with survivors, business owners, and families enabled the sharing of personal experiences and critical information. The study utilized FEMA emergency management tools to support the claims. Moving forward with the logic model, I remained aligned with the research purpose, problem, and administrative issue being examined.

The logic model had many components that supported the study. The logic model allows readers to visualize the presented data, thus explaining the information more informally. The layout of the logic model can include, but is not limited to, the following. Inputs, activities, and outputs were integrated into the logic model. The outcomes are short-term, intermediate, and long-term. The assumptions and or external factors will include finances, services available, hardships, and service disruptions.

This organization is committed to providing essential services to communities that need emergency response and recovery services. Solving this administrative problem for this client organization can drastically increase the probability of positive outcomes among individuals and communities needing supportive services after a disaster. Additionally, doing so will increase community resilience levels while reducing social vulnerability through proactive measures.

Definition of Terms

Emergency management: A professional and academic discipline focused on increasing safety through comprehensive planning and management of resources across the emergency management cycle, including hazard mitigation, emergency preparedness, disaster response, and disaster recovery (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2023).

Social Vulnerability Index: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines the social vulnerability index as a disaster response tool for emergency management professionals to identify, assess, and plan for communities that would need support during all phases of a disaster and a public health crisis (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, 2022, p. 1).

Community Resilience: Community resilience is defined as a community's ability to take action before a disaster to anticipate and address anticipated risks and threats, and to recover from the disruption or damage in an effective and timely manner (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2020).

FEMA Resilience Analysis Planning Tool (Rapt): The Resilience Analysis and Planning Tool equips emergency management professionals with world-class mitigation, response, recovery, and resilience tools, including access to power geospatial data and GIS mapping capabilities to view variables critical to make planning decisions (FEMA, 2023).

Significance

This study is significant because this organization was started to address unmet needs within the service region. The founders of this organization continued to see emerging social concerns and issues within the service region for many years and noticed that marginalized populations and individuals were most affected. As a result, they came together and decided that a grassroots social service nonprofit organization needed to be established to address past, present, and future issues through an ears-to-the-ground approach. This approach has continued to increase public trust, public perception, and insight from those most connected to local communities. Through ongoing communication, this organization is not only informed on social issues, but also understands the underlying root causes, creating opportunity for systematic change.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate unmet individual and community needs often associated with disasters, thereby furthering the organization's mission. This was accomplished by identifying and addressing unmet needs following a natural disaster by utilizing a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and Disaster Recovery Framework (DRF) during various phases of the recovery process. The delivered product will be used by administrators in adequately evaluating the unmet needs of vulnerable populations and at-risk communities through disaster management planning.

Discovering and addressing such gaps in service amongst at-risk communities and vulnerable populations can lead to increased community resiliency levels and participation from all community members. In addition to addressing unmet needs, this essential organization will have the knowledge needed to create a comprehensive disaster recovery plan to address present and future community unmet needs. Addressing unmet needs can demand a whole community approach. This means that all community members must take responsibility for addressing associated risks in the area. After consulting with the executive and regional director, solving this administrative problem would be imperative to the impact and sustainability of the disaster services department. Many elements within the professional administrative study will make original contributions to the department and the organization, thus furthering the organization's mission.

The significance of the Post Disaster Needs Assessment is that the process demands participation and coordination from populations affected, stakeholders, public administrators, and non-government organizations to accomplish needs in the recovery strategy (Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2013, p. 15).

The significance of the disaster recovery framework is that the DRF has five expected outcomes, which are: standardized approach paired with policy implementation, inclusive processes while remaining transparent of all activities, maintaining clear and concise communication among all stakeholders, comprehensive recovery framework, integration of ongoing evaluation processes to monitor the effectiveness of current and projected recovery objectives (Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2020, p. 8).

Summary

Often, federal contracts are released to this organization to provide Disaster Case Management, which can take up to a year to receive. Receiving federal disaster case management contracts can require a preliminary damage assessment, a county and state declaration, and a motion to have it moved to a presidential decision for a federal declaration. If approved, federal funding, resources, and expertise can be assigned to the incident. This qualitative study examined how this community-based organization will integrate in a post-disaster needs assessment and a disaster recovery plan by using a logic model that evaluates and addresses unmet needs among vulnerable and at-risk populations, thereby mitigating the 1-year service gap. This community-based organization will evaluate unmet needs among vulnerable populations by utilizing a post-disaster needs assessment to address the 1-year gap in service. Solving this service barrier will result in more clients being served.

Section 2 includes an introduction, an administrative problem, and a literature search strategy, including peer-reviewed articles and practice-focused research questions related to the study. The section also includes a list of key terms, the scope of the term, and a summary of the searchers. The conceptual framework will include relevant models and theories. The information provided will synthesize the related literature and research based on the conceptual framework used in the study. This section will include a rationale for choosing this framework and describe how it relates to the practice-focused problem faced by the client organization.

Section 2: Conceptual Framework and Relevant Literature

Introduction

Following a federally declared disaster within the service region, Disaster Case Management Programs contracts can be funded by FEMA, which can take up to a year to receive, resulting in a significant gap in an individual's and community's recovery. This 1-year gap in service can drastically impact communities that were most affected by a human-caused or natural disaster. Many populations affected by disasters may not have access to the necessary resources to fully recover on time. Having a solution that not only identifies this issue but creates sustainable solutions that could greatly impact communities all around the region.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to equip the client organization with a post-disaster needs assessment and disaster recovery plan by utilizing a logic model that evaluates and addresses unmet needs amongst vulnerable populations and at-risk populations, mitigating the 1-year gap in service. Administrators within the organization will receive the delivered product, which can enable them to quickly evaluate the unmet needs of vulnerable populations and at-risk communities through disaster management planning.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the Walden University academic library to identify and evaluate peer-reviewed articles that pertain to the professional administrative study. The EBSCO discovery service powers this university library. I also used specific search criteria to strengthen search results in the university library. This includes but is not limited to starting with research by subject with a focus on public policy and public administration, selection of peer-reviewed scholarly journals, keywords, and publication dates that are relatively less than 5 years old. Key search terms used in the Walden University library search bar included, but are not limited to: *emergency management, access, and functional needs, mental health and disasters, mitigation, prevention, emergency preparedness, recovery, case management, FEMA, California wildfires, non-profits in emergency management, and socioeconomic status. Combinations of searched terms included, but were not limited to, post-disaster needs assessment, hazard identification, disaster recovery plans,* and *disaster case management programs*. Additional keywords used in the Walden University library search bar include but were not limited to: *emergency management, access, and functional needs, mental health and disasters, mitigation, prevention, emergency preparedness, recovery, case management, FEMA, California wildfires, non-profits in emergency management,* and *socioeconomic status*.

The scope of this review in terms of years searched included examining credible data that was less than 5 years old. Sources searched included articles and publications from leader organizations from federal, state, and local emergency management levels. This included, but is not limited to, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the California Office of Emergency Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Voluntary Organization Active During Disaster. Sources also searched included geographic information systems, demographics, community resilience indicator scores, and wildfire severity.

Summary of federal emergency management organization open-source data. FEMA's geospatial resource center provides emergency management professionals with world-class emergency management geospatial data. Geographic information systems in emergency management give professionals capabilities such as risk analysis, data-driven decisions, and local hazard mitigation planning (Mete & Biyik, 2024, p. 357). Data can be used to prepare for, respond to, and recover from human-caused and natural disasters. FEMA's Resilience and Planning Tool, RAPT, equips emergency management professionals and public administrators with the necessary tools to understand risk and social vulnerability. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Social Vulnerability Index allows users to quickly see risk assessment levels amongst counties selected within the United States of America.

Conceptual Framework

I used the logic model as the conceptual framework for this research study. The logic model will include the following elements: Inputs, activities, outputs, short-term outcomes, long-term outcomes, assumptions, external factors, and measurements. The post-disaster needs assessment and the disaster recovery plan will be integrated into the logic model. Logic models increase the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes through ongoing communication of expected results, anticipated actions, the focal point of information, improved implementation, and evaluation of barriers within the project (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018, p. 3). Logic models are living documents that should be revised periodically to analyze new objectives, goals, data, lessons learned, and future milestones (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018,

p. 3). Logic models can visually show key decision-makers trends, patterns, evaluations, and projections regarding program activities. Logic models display critical information through visual representation, thus making it easier to communicate and understand the literature review while promoting transparency to public administrators and subject matter experts (Sauve et al., 2022, p. 523).

Following a destructive and complex disaster, many organizations conducting disaster recovery operations may conduct a needs assessment to evaluate areas of concern properly. Assessments can collect critical data to identify immediate, short-term, and long-term recovery needs and actions to mitigate future risks. Many assessments paired with different methodologies can result in ongoing miscommunication and improper evaluations of unmet needs. To combat these potential issues, the Post Disaster Needs Assessment was created to create a standardized approach to ensure all stakeholders follow proper assessment policies and procedures. On September 25, 2008, the European Commission, the United Nations Development Group, and the World Bank adopted a joint declaration for the creation, adoption, and implementation of a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) to serve as a recovery framework with the purpose of increases resiliency levels amongst vulnerable populations by increasing capacity amongst stakeholders during all phases of a disaster (Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2013, p. 1).

Serving as a disaster recovery framework tool, emergency management practitioners can quickly implement these resources to increase their chances of achieving desired outcomes. The Post-Disaster Needs Assessment tool establishes a standardized framework for assessing impact, damage, loss, and the needs for immediate, short-term, and long-term recovery across all sectors during the recovery process (Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2013, p. 3). The development of this recovery framework strategy outlines high-priority needs, recovery interventions, expected outcomes, and the cost of recovery reconstruction methods (Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2013, p. 13). This consolidated impact and needs assessment process helps develop comprehensive recovery planning strategies, enabling the faster deployment of critical resources to areas most in need. A completed assessment can show physical damage, economic impacts, infrastructure damage, and the associated cost of immediate and long-term recovery priorities.

Rationale

The logic model included the following elements: Inputs, activities, outputs, short-term outcomes, long-term outcomes, assumptions, external factors, and measurements. The post-disaster needs assessment and the disaster recovery plan have been integrated into the logic model. The logic model can be used to measure various metrics. The post-disaster needs assessment is a comprehensive survey that can be quickly deployed amongst geographical regions to evaluate complex needs in a structured and organized fashion. Through this assessment, emergency management professionals and responding organizations can identify and address persons and communities most in need of supportive services, thus shortening the timeline needed to recover. The disaster recovery plan will serve as a roadmap and guide to increase the probability of achieving organizational and community recovery goals.

This community-based organization currently faces a mission-critical administrative problem. To effectively carry out the organization's mission statement, supportive services must be delivered effectively and in a timely manner. The Disaster Services Department currently receives disaster case management program contracts following a federal presidential declaration. Once authorized, contracts may be given to primary and secondary grant recipients. This process can take 6 months to a year. This essential gap in service limits the organization’s ability to mitigate short-term and long-term hardships. Without prompt deployment of early intervention strategies, the likelihood of adverse health reactions can increase dramatically due to financial, mental, and physical stressors. Such health reactions can include, but are not limited to, anxiety, isolation, rage, guilt, sadness, nightmares, flashbacks, and post-traumatic stress disorder. A logic model will equip this organization with the necessary framework to identify key components to improve disaster program functions.

A logic model will equip the agency and emergency management professionals with an evaluation tool that can initially and continuously monitor desired outcomes. The post-disaster needs assessment is a comprehensive process that quickly evaluates the needs of persons and communities most impacted by a disaster. Evaluating needs can result in increased speed and frequency of delivered resources to aid recovery. The disaster recovery plan creates a framework that can aid faster deployment of disaster recovery operations. This plan acts as an emergency management policy for the organization and department. Once adopted, this resource will allow information to be shared amongst other organizations to ensure a uniform response is given to those most in need. In addition, a logic model will equip the client organization with the tools needed to organize variables that share a relationship with one another.

A logic model can be used for emergency management planning, performance metrics, projections, and navigation tools to ensure program deliverables are being consistently met. The frequency and severity of disasters nationwide can prompt organizations to develop a logic model, gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that affect community impact. Like other emergency management policies and procedures, logic models require in-depth planning, evaluation, and ongoing maintenance. Just like an emergency operation, continuity of operations, and hazard mitigation plan, it must not sit on a shelf collecting dust, but rather be a living document that is regularly trained on. This evaluation process increases the probability of achieving desired results by communicating them, serves as a visual roadmap, improves evaluation methods, identifies problematic areas, and displays areas of improvement, involving stakeholder involvement (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018, p. 1). These models can be program, department, and organization-specific depending on the area being examined.

Logic Model

A logic model can help organizations visualize the correlation between activities and intended results. These models can be accomplished through internal and external community stakeholder engagement. Creating, adopting, and continuously revising logic models can deliver significant value to emergency management organizations by integrating comprehensive information into the models. Logic models equip organizations with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions. Each organization's priorities may differ, but many disaster relief organizations can benefit from creating a logic model. The situation aspect of the logic model serves as its foundation. Situation is a category that can be examined in the event of a human-caused or natural disaster, essential services are disrupted, creating additional hardships for populations considered socially vulnerable. Socially vulnerable populations can face prolonged disaster recovery timelines due to many variables. These variables can include, but are not limited to, the following: income, age, geography, access and functional needs, rural communities, gender, education, access to transportation, language spoken, frequency of disasters in the region, and poverty levels.

The inputs section of the logic model discusses resources needed to implement program activities. Depending on the program design and overall impact, specific resources may be needed to implement the project, including other community-based and faith-based organizations, community stakeholders, and public administrators. Each resource can serve a specific purpose in program implementation across various stages of the project. Support from local community foundations for funding and access to trusted messengers can increase the probability of achieving desired project outcomes. The outputs section within a logic model focuses on the direct result of program activities. In emergency management, this can include a crisis intervention program that provides 100 wildfire survivors with disaster recovery resources at an evacuation center or local assistance centers. This can be measured by the number of community- and faith-based organizations involved in recovery, the number of persons provided resources, the number of evacuation centers attended, the number of local assistance centers attended, and the number of disaster recovery centers attended.

The activities section of the logic model describes actions provided to achieve program outcomes. In emergency management, this can include services provided before, during, and after a human-caused or natural disaster, which is often referred to as the emergency management cycle. The emergency management cycle has five primary components: prevention, response, recovery, preparedness, and mitigation. Prevention is the action of reducing the risk of future critical incidents and disruption of essential services. Response actions taken during the incident. Recovery actions for community and individual disaster recovery goals. Preparedness action to increase community readiness in response to a disaster. Mitigation actions to decrease loss of life and destruction of property. Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters are community-based organizations that work within the emergency management cycle to achieve emergency management goals.

Long-Term Recovery Groups are similar and focus on addressing short-term, intermediate, and long-term recovery goals. Funding for such goals usually requires the financial support from an unmet needs roundtable. These funders disperse funds for specific recovery goals set by the funders, determined by the identification of needs, resource availability, and the complexity of the case. Working with the private sector, providing essential training, and communicating clearly, concisely, and consistently with the media can also help achieve program outcomes. The assumption section within a logic model can equip administrators with the information needed to make key decisions in emergency management. During an active natural or human-caused disaster, assumptions can be made based on areas affected and resources that have been ordered.

This can include the number of community- and faith-based organizations involved in recovery, the number of persons affected, the number of persons given resources, and the number of individuals and families attending evacuation centers and local assistance centers established. Assumptions can also be used to determine the number of communities prepared by evaluating the number of individuals who signed up for emergency alerts and the number who attended risk reduction courses prior to the incident. The outcomes section of the logic model describes the benefits that will result from implementing the intended activities. In the non-profit space, this can look like higher client satisfaction scores, increased community impact, and the achievement of intended results. Short-term recovery needs include, but are limited to, the incident date, one year. Examples include, but are not limited to, assistance with the delivery of food, water, shelter, and power; assistance with identifying the medical needs of general and vulnerable populations; sanitation; and the provision of interpretation services.

Intermediate recovery needs include, but are not limited to, 1 to 3 years. Provide services to mitigate adverse reactions, aid in starting the process of creating an individual disaster recovery plan, continue to aid with supportive programs such as Disaster Cal-Fresh and Disaster Unemployment Assistance if needed, Work with Long-Term Recovery Groups, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, and Unmet Needs Roundtables, and write grants to address needs that have been identified. Long-term recovery needs three to ten plus years, assistance in achieving safe and sustainable housing, construction of homes for individuals and families impacted, critical infrastructure replacement, and resilient centers/resource centers. Organizations implementing a logic model to create and implement a program may need to consider external factors.

External factors can influence community impact and program activities. This can include public perception, community culture, community support, funding priorities, and the influence of community stakeholders. Public administrators' political viewpoints may also influence the level of government support provided. Integrating performance metrics into a logic model can increase the probability of achieving desired results. Creating measurable benchmarks helps monitor progression and projections. This can be achieved through a set of program deliverables and short- and long-term recovery goals, for which a cost-benefit analysis can be used to evaluate the costs versus benefits of the actions taken. Depending on the specific program being implemented, other goals may include the number of families and individuals served within a specific time frame, the number of homes rebuilt, data collection on service scores, and the percentage of funds used.

Literature Review for the Study

The majority of federal funding to support communities affected by disasters comes from the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act. This act was adopted on November 23, 1988, and was created to address ongoing concerns with the prolonged federal response. Federal assistance to support disaster recovery efforts may only be utilized when the local and state governments have been overwhelmed, paired with a damage assessment and a presidential declaration (Schroeder & Collins, 2019,

p. 1181).

Once a disaster or major service disruption occurs, the local government deploys resources, and if the complexity is too great, a state request will be made. If the state determines that additional assistance is needed based on the preliminary damage assessment. The results from the assessment are then relayed to the governor of the state, who will then request federal assistance from a FEMA regional office. Once the request is received, FEMA sends the request to the President for a decision on a federal declaration. Based on the information the President has received, a release of federal assistance may or may not be given (Schroeder & Collins, 2019, p. 1184).

The client organization is a part of the Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) network, which includes Catholic Dioceses from around the country. CCUSA provides guidance and funding to support emergency management activities before, during, and after a disaster. During the recovery phase, CCUSA works with local catholic social service organizations regarding providing disaster case management and services to help clients achieve their recovery plan through coordination with Long-Term Recovery Groups (Catholic Charities USA, 2018, p. 5). Catholic Charities USA aids agencies in developing response and recovery plans, coordinates resources in the CCUSA network, including FEMA, and shares human and material resources to aid in disaster operations (Catholic Charities USA, 2018, p. 10). Achieving disaster recovery goals demands participation from all community partners and cannot be managed at the federal level alone. Achieving individual and community disaster recovery goals requires coordination with federal, state, and local partners, faith-based organizations, the private sector, and those most impacted (Sledge & Thomas, 2019, p. 442).

A brief history of the problem includes disasters that disrupt critical infrastructure and supportive services to at-risk populations. Since 1974, FEMA has relied on ten regions within the country, which include management and budget regions that include states, tribes, and territories, designed to deploy resources and funds quickly (Margus et al., 2023, p. 3428). Before long-term recovery can begin following a presidentially federally declared disaster, FEMA contracts must be given to various organizations to perform the duties. Receiving such contracts from the primary and secondary grant recipients can take six months to a year. During this time, communities and individuals can face additional hardships due to contract delays and the lack of services and intervention. Emergency management strategies and standard practices have been used in the past by various organizations at the federal, state, and local levels.

I have reviewed and synthesized multiple studies related to the current state of practice based on both peer-reviewed and practice-focused research. This has included examining peer-reviewed articles in the Walden University library with keyword searches and filters, FEMA geospatial data, FEMA's presidential federal declaration process, National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, Catholic Charities USA Disaster Response, and many others. Other organizations within emergency management have adopted the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) standards to ensure that organizations can deliver the best quality of service in this field of study. The Emergency Management Accreditation Program is a nationally recognized, non-profit organization that accredits emergency management programs that comply with comprehensive emergency management policies and standards. Programs being accessed undergo a comprehensive on-site assessment process in which over thirty standards are examined for compliance.

Many programs adopt this national standard and model as it lays the foundation for emergency management elements to be included in all aspects of the department's planning process. There is no other emergency management program standard in the world that goes above and beyond the standards of excellence within this discipline. To increase response efforts, many communities will create local Voluntary Organizations Active During Disaster. VOAD is a coalition of community partners to increase communication, coordination, cooperation, and collaboration before, during, and after a disaster. VOADs often form Long-Term Recovery Groups working with community stakeholders to address short-term, intermediate, and long-term recovery goals. Long-Term Recovery Groups often work with the Unmet Needs Roundtable to address the unmet needs of the most affected clients by filling financial and services gaps. Disaster Case Managers within a Disaster Case Management program advocate for clients by presenting their case for assistance to the Unmet Needs Roundtable, seeking assistance.

Summary

Disaster Services provides services before, during, and after a disaster. The logic model will serve as the conceptual framework. It will include inputs, activities, outputs, short-term outcomes, long-term outcomes, assumptions, external factors, and measurements. The post-disaster needs assessment and the disaster recovery plan will seamlessly integrate into the logic model and can be quickly deployed to evaluate short-term, intermediate, and long-term unmet needs. Section 3 will briefly reintroduce the administrative problem: practice-focused research questions and research design. Data has been presented, and the collection and analysis will address questions. The strategy for data analysis is a type and procedure for coding. Issues of trustworthiness will include procedures to validate credibility. Methods will also be displayed to show dependability and confirmability. Ethical procedures will include agreements to gain access to participants and submission of an application to the Institutional Review Board. This application will include various procedures set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A description of data protection and other ethical concerns has been provided.

Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

Introduction

The client organization is a non-profit social service organization that serves vulnerable and at-risk communities in six counties in the Pacific Northwest. The organization's service region has experienced many recent natural disasters, uprooting communities. Disaster Services, a department under the organization, focuses on providing emergency management services to the service region before, during, and after a disaster. Providing disaster recovery services to families and individuals affected by a disaster has been complex and prolonged due to the administrative issue the organization is currently working on solving.

A presidentially declared disaster must be reported to provide Disaster Case Management services to persons affected by a federally declared disaster. This process can be time-consuming and complex due to the multiple layers of approvals that must be obtained, as well as a preliminary damage assessment. This lapse in time can often result in the agency receiving Disaster Case Management contracts 6 months to 1 year after the initial request. Persons who have opted in to receive our case management services may feel that too much time has passed, resulting in additional hardships. This professional administrative study will provide the client organization with many deliverables to address this critical administrative issue.

Practice-Focused Research Question and Research Design

The focus research question for the study was: How can the client organization implement a disaster management planning system that evaluates the unmet needs of vulnerable populations and at-risk communities following a disaster and addresses the 1-year gap in service often associated with federal contracts to address such issues? Following a natural disaster, many unmet needs from a community may arise rather quickly due to ongoing and ever-changing needs. This organization often does not receive disaster case-management contracts through FEMA until a year later.

This 1-year gap in service can lead to additional harm, suffering, and damage amongst at-risk communities and vulnerable populations in our service region. In this study, I examined why vulnerable populations often face significant barriers during disaster recovery. Solutions have been created to address both administrative issues in their Disaster Services department. Deliverables to address the administrative problem will include a post-disaster needs assessment to evaluate the unmet needs of vulnerable populations and at-risk communities through disaster management planning, more specifically, a disaster recovery plan as a deliverable. The purpose of this qualitative study was to equip the community-based organization with a post-disaster needs assessment and disaster recovery plan by utilizing a logic model that evaluates and addresses unmet needs among vulnerable and at-risk populations, thereby mitigating the 1-year service gap, as stated by the executive director.

Roles of the Researcher and Client Organization

I have spoken with the director of disaster programs for this organization, and as the lead administrator for this department, they stated that this administrative problem has affected the organization and its clients for many years. The director has held various emergency management positions during his employment at the organization. The executive director is the highest-ranking position within the organization and the director's immediate supervisor. She is very passionate about the Disaster Services department and is excited to have me lead the department and solve this administrative problem for the organization.

I collected qualitative data through surveys and interviews with various participants. Participants will include members of local VOADs, LTRGs, and agency administrators. VOADs is a coalition of community partners from various sectors, which can include, but is not limited to, federal, state, and local governments, private sectors, faith-based organizations, and community-based organizations. VOADs collectively work together to prepare, respond to, and recover from disasters in their region. Local VOADS in our area are non-paid and meet on a frequency that the local VOAD Chair determines. The relationship I share with VOAD members is professional, and I am not their supervisor or hold any power over any member. Long-term recovery groups have a similar organizational structure to a VOAD, as LTRGs are typically set up through the collective efforts of a VOAD.

Long-term recovery groups address community and individual unmet recovery needs following a natural disaster. Community partners include federal, state, local, faith-based, community-based, and private-sector organizations. The organization's administrators who will partake in the study will consist of the executive director, the director of operations, the chief financial officer, and the mental health director. All of these positions have been with agency since the inception of the Disaster Services Department. All of these positions are higher than my position on the organizational structure. I have no biases regarding the professional administrative study for the client organization. Community partners participating in the survey will have an opportunity to reflect on their experience, data, and organizational values.

Participation disclosure agreements were presented verbally and in writing, with my chair's approval and recommendations, to the Walden University Institutional Review Board. By doing so, participants understood the survey's intent, how data would be used, and how the data would be protected. Agency administrators participating in the survey have provided data based on their own experiences. I have expressed verbally and in writing that my relationship with the client organization will not be considered in the responses, as I am currently serving as a Doctoral scholar at Walden University. Questions can be asked to reflect issues that the organization faced before my appointment to my new position. A community-based organization located in the Pacific Northwest will serve as the client organization. The organization provided access to participants through local VOADS and LTRGS. In addition, various agency administrators will give me data regarding the administrative issues they continue to face affecting populations and communities most affected by multiple disasters.

As an emergency management professional and doctoral scholar, I have access to all the necessary resources to carry out this professional administrative study effectively. This includes testimonials from the organization administrators and data community parties. In addition, I have access to grant documents from various funders showing award amounts to help solve this administrative issue. Documents provided by the client organization can include, but are not limited to, financial documents, funding amounts, and grant reports.

Methodology

This study implemented a qualitative research design to solve the current administrative issue. Data were collected in various ways, including interviews and surveys among community partners that continue to face adversity due to the increased frequency of natural and human-caused hazards. As stated earlier, a logic model, disaster needs assessment, and a disaster recovery plan have been created to evaluate and address the administrative issue presented by the executive director. Data were collected through interviews and surveys with community stakeholders and organizations active during disasters. Their direct relationships with survivors, business owners, and families will allow personal experiences to be shared, as well as critical information. In addition, information was pulled from various FEMA emergency management tools to support the claims being presented.

While moving forward with the logic model, I remained aligned with the research purpose, problem, and administrative issue being examined. The purpose of this qualitative study was to equip this community-based organization with a post-disaster needs assessment and disaster recovery plan by utilizing a logic model that evaluates and addresses unmet needs amongst vulnerable populations and at-risk populations, mitigating the 1-year gap in service, as stated by the executive director for the organization. Solving this service barrier within the Disaster Services Departments will result in more clients being served while increasing the probability of achieving organizational, program, and community recovery goals.

The relationship of this evidence to the purpose described in Section 1 can bring credibility to the data being collected in solving the administrative issue being examined. Data collection through community partners' experiences of the same or similar situations with communities and disaster survivors can result in authentic answers. Equipping the client organization with deliverables that can increase response and recovery times means common issues stated by community partners can be resolved quickly. Collection and analysis of the information gathered from community partners and publications from emergency organizations will shed light on problems and solutions that, in turn, can elevate the need for this administrative problem to be solved. Information gathered will also ensure alignment of common issues that arise in the region before, during, and after a disaster.

Data collection efforts were carried out to ensure that the data is organized, secure, and confidential. The NVivo data management system was used to collect, analyze, visualize, and organize data captured within the study. NVivo offers many organizational tools that will aid in evaluating the data collected. This can include, but is not limited to, the creation of folders, importation of documents, transcripts, field notes, and the creation of data sets.

Archival and Operational Data

Data collected from surveys, one-on-one interviews, and group interviews was used in conjunction with other data, providing a variety of sources and results. These sources included emergency management geographic information systems, national risk reduction surveys, peer-reviewed articles, and much more. FEMA, Cal-OES, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have created and published these articles or maps. The purpose of emergency management geographic information systems is to equip emergency management professionals with world-class information and tools. Information collected can be used for data-driven decisions before, during, and after a disaster has occurred. I examined geographic information systems that displayed social vulnerabilities, risk levels of natural hazards, and community resilience levels. From here, cross-examined data collected from individual participants to demonstrate a social issue that often occurs when a disaster affects communities within the area. Information was used to bring additional credibility to the information being presented by community partners.

This information can also shed light on the importance of solving the administrative issue that the client organization is facing. FEMA consistently works with federal, state, and local organizations to routinely update their emergency management tools. This can include, but is not limited to, the U.S. Census, Department of Homeland Security, State Emergency Management organizations, and WhiteHouse.gov. Limitations of the various online FEMA emergency management tools include inaccurate usage of the tools and filters being displayed. As mentioned earlier, peer-reviewed articles can be used, which can be captured through the Walden University library. Limitations of the peer-reviewed articles can include author bias, publication year, and sample size being evaluated. The emergency management tools that were used are open for anyone to use.

No special permissions are required. Historical documents that were examined included after-action reviews/ incident reports of complex incidents within the area. These documents will break down the timeline of the most destructive disasters in the area while shedding light on the lessons learned before, during, and after the disaster. Often, action reviews are conducted by either a local emergency management organization or through an interagency investigation staffed by subject matter experts.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data collection was collected from participants in a wide variety of ways. This included, but was not limited to, surveys on Google Forms or a platform suggested by my Chair, as well as group and one-on-one interviews. Recruitment included requesting involvement from local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters and Long-Term Recovery Groups to participate in the study. The client organization's administrators have been aware of the data collection process and were excited to participate in a project that will help their department and organization improve. Additionally, peer-reviewed publications from Walden University were utilized to support the topics discussed in the professional administrative study. Publications from trusted federal, state, and local emergency management organizations were used to support the evidence provided by the participants, as well as peer-reviewed articles. The number of participants involved will include various organization administrators, VOADs, and LTRGs members.

The procedure that was followed included a sample size of fifteen participants or until a saturation point has been reached. The goal is to have answers aligned, and the saturation point has been reached, which can be reached with fifteen participants. The client organization is a member of all of the local VOADs and LTRGs. This social service non-profit organization actively works with many of the participants from partner organizations within local volunteer organizations that are active during disasters and long-term recovery groups. Participants from VOADs and LTRGs were contacted by me directly or through the VOAD's Communication Chair or Secretary. Data has been collected from Google Forms Surveys and one-on-one and group interviews. The data collection process was conducted through ongoing communication with participants and me.

The frequency of data collection will include giving participants multiple opportunities to participate. The duration of the data collection amongst the VOADs and LTRGs was one month, as the topic was presented, and members had time before the next scheduled meeting. Data was recorded in a written format either through the Google Forms Survey or comprehensive notes from one-on-one and group interviews. This included routine follow-up with participants. If the number of samples is limited, I will continue to contact the Communication Chair and Secretary seeking further involvement. Four administrators within the client organization participated in the study. If needed, I can expand the organizations involved in the study, consisting of Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Charities within the organization’s service area, as both fund our efforts and provide strategic guidance. The questions being asked were open-ended to allowing participants to share their experiences while not limiting their responses.

This strategy will ensure no biases are present by allowing answers to be expressed in their own opinions. Questions will not be asked, presenting numerical values or scores. The answers received were examined for alignment and patterns with the overall administrative problem. When multiple participants have similar answers regarding common issues surrounding disasters in the north state and disaster case management, assumptions can be made. All data collection methods were decided upon consultation with my Chair. Survey and interview questions were created in a way that presents multiple topics in emergency management. Topics for discussion in the surveys and interviews will include the importance of disaster recovery plans, logic models, post-disaster needs assessment, and common issues with disaster case management.

Strategy for Data Analysis

Data that was used in conjunction with data collected from surveys, one-on-one interviews, and group interviews included a variety of sources. Participants in interviews or surveys were asked specific questions to enhance the client organization's ability to address administrative issues by discussing historical trends and sharing their experiences, opinions, and insights. These sources will include emergency management geographic information systems, national risk reduction surveys, peer-reviewed articles, and much more. FEMA, Cal-OES, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have created and published these articles or maps. The purpose of emergency management geographic information systems is to equip emergency management professionals with world-class information. Information collected can be used for data-driven decisions before, during, and after a disaster has occurred. Data was examined from geographic information systems, which displayed social vulnerabilities, risk levels of natural hazards, and community resilience levels. From here, cross-examined data collected from individual participants to demonstrate a social issue that often occurs when a disaster affects communities within the region.

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Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility amongst the data being collected has been verified in a wide variety of ways. This can include analyzing peer-reviewed journals at Walden University, filtering the search by keywords, and looking at the publication dates for relevance. Data collected from partner organizations, such as Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters or Long-Term Recovery Group members, have already been verified and voted in the administrative positions. Administrators from the organization participating in the surveys, one-on-one, and group interviews are either Directors or Officers, credible to the data being collected. As the Emergency Management Professional, I have worked with this community-based organization for many years within the client organization's service region. In addition, the administrators involved in the data collection process experienced these administrative issues well before the inception of the Disaster Services department, displaying prolonged involvement. Transferability will include a thick description and variation in participation selection.

Thick description details will include the environment where the one-on-one and group interviews took place, and social and cultural values. Variations in participation selection will include persons with diverse backgrounds and experience with disasters in the organization's jurisdiction. The selection process will consider experiences and perspectives on the administrative problem. Dependability was accomplished by integrating audit trails and triangulation in the research design. Audit trails will include maintaining records of the research process and data collection. Triangulation was accomplished through analysis of information gathered through various methods, observing similarities and differences amongst data that has been collected. Confirmability was accomplished by utilizing the previous methods to bring validation to the data collection process. This includes audit trails, thick descriptions, triangulation, and member checking, as described earlier.

Ethical Procedures

The Institutional Review Board application form has been sent and is currently under review to provide tailored guidance. The Institutional Review Board and my Chair will decide on agreements to gain access to participants or data. Form A provided recommendations on the areas and supporting documents required to proceed with the study. A research Ethics Support Specialist for the Institutional Review Board office will provide ongoing communication to ensure everything complies before the study progresses. Data collection from human participants is being treated in a professional and confidential manner. I ensured the intent of the data collection was disclosed in writing. IRB approvals include approving community partners to be involved in the data collection process. Participants will include, but are not limited to, members from VOAD, Long-Term Recovery Groups, and the client organization.

Form A from the IRB has been approved. NVivo was utilized to protect and store confidential information. NVivo allows users the capability to manage and evaluate data that has been imported without compromising the individuals' identifying characteristics. NVivo allows users to store information in encrypted folders. NVivo is password-protected and has encrypted drives that can store information with a higher sensitivity rating. This platform can be utilized to generate reports to show research alignment, saturation, and sampling. I referred to my Chair and recommendation from the Institutional Review Board regarding how many members, if any, will have access to information stored in NVivo. Storage for data collection will include password-protected online files, as well as external storage that is locked in my home office. The client organization will be presented with this administrative study in which client and participant information has been masked. Data collected will be retained for a period of five years. Data destruction will include a consultation with members of the Institutional Review Board to ensure academic compliance. All ethical issues for this study have been mentioned within the Institutional Review Board application.

Summary

The frequency of destructive disasters in the area continues to place extreme demands on resources. From 2015 to 2025, the state of California experienced a series of historical wildfires, including the Camp Fire in Butte County, which burned over 17,000 structures, claimed the lives of over 80 individuals, and consumed more than 150,000 acres (Rosenthal, Stover, & Haar, 2021, p. 2). The frequency and severity of wildfires have continued to be a public concern in recent years because of smoke pollution, economic loss, damaged infrastructure, and threats to people's lives (Cisneros et al., 2023, p. 302). Contracts to provide Disaster Case Management among the communities affected by FEMA can be prolonged due to complexities surrounding the decision-making process. Deliverables given will include, but are not limited to, a post-disaster needs assessment, a logic model, and a disaster recovery plan. Qualitative data were collected through interviews and surveys with administrators of community-based organizations and their community partners. A qualitative research design has been implemented to solve the current administrative issue.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to equip the client organization with a post-disaster needs assessment and disaster recovery plan by utilizing a logic model that evaluates and addresses unmet needs among vulnerable and at-risk populations, thereby mitigating the 1-year gap in service. The NVivo, a qualitative data management system, will collect, analyze, visualize, protect, and organize data captured within the study. The comprehensive software will also store, protect, and evaluate critical information being stored in the system. Data collection from human participants is being treated in a professional and confidential manner. Data collected will be retained for a period of five years. Data destruction will include a consultation with members of the Institutional Review Board to ensure academic compliance. The Institutional Review Board application addresses all ethical issues related to this study.

Section 4 includes an introduction, demographics, data collection, data analysis, findings, deliverables, recommendations, evidence of trustworthiness, strengths, limitations of the study, and a summary that transitions to section 5. The introduction explains the purpose of the study and the administrative problem that the client organization is facing. The demographics section provides an overview of the participants involved in the study, including their demographic characteristics. This section categorizes demographics into two primary groups: survey and interview groups. The data collection phase outlines the date the Institutional Review Board at Walden University granted permission for me to proceed with data collection. Data analysis explains how exactly the data was captured and analyzed. The findings present data and opinions from subject matter experts who work for organizations that provide supportive services before, during, and after a disaster has occurred. Results and recommendations display actions that the client organization can take to improve, decrease, and potentially resolve its administrative problem. Evidence of trustworthiness explains why and how the participants were chosen. Strengths and limitations explain the strengths and limitations of the data within the study. Lastly, there is a summary transition to Section 5.

Section 4: Results and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to equip the organization under review with a post-disaster needs assessment and disaster recovery plan by utilizing a logic model that evaluates and addresses unmet needs among vulnerable and at-risk populations, thereby mitigating the 1-year gap in service, often associated with receiving federal disaster case management contracts, as stated by the executive director. Solving this service barrier within the Disaster Services Departments will result in more clients being served while increasing the probability of achieving organizational, program, and community recovery goals. I also examined why populations are most affected during the disaster recovery process. Solutions were created to address both administrative issues in their Disaster Services department.

Deliverables to address the administrative problem will include a post-disaster needs assessment to evaluate the unmet needs of vulnerable populations and at-risk communities through disaster management planning, more specifically, a disaster recovery plan as a deliverable. Following a natural disaster, many unmet needs within a community may arise quickly due to the ongoing and ever-changing nature of these needs. The executive director emphasized the importance of seeking sustainable solutions to address the frequent 1-year gap in service, which can lead to additional harm, suffering, and damage among at-risk communities and vulnerable populations in our service region.

Demographics

All participants involved in this study are members of local, state, and national voluntary organizations active during disasters and long-term recovery groups. Five participants participated in the study through in-person and virtual interviews. The interviews featured a diverse range of participants. It included one Latino male whose age range was between 55 and 60. It also included four separate women: a 45-50-year-old White Female, a 50-55-year-old White Female, a 55-60-year-old White Female, and a 45-50-year-old White Female. Ten participants participated through a Google Forms survey. The surveys featured a diverse range of participants. It included seven separate men: a 60-65-year-old White male, a 60-65-year-old White male, a 45-50-year-old White male, a 50-55-year-old White male, a 40-45-year-old White male, a 55-60-year-old White male, and a 40-45-year-old Native American male. Additionally, it included four separate women: a 40- to 45-year-old Latina woman, a 45- to 50-year-old White woman, and a 30- to 35-year-old Latina woman.

The participants involved in this study work for state and local governments, as well as numerous community-based organizations focused on emergency management. All are actively employed by an organization that provides supportive services in emergency management, and they all shared valuable data on their experiences, insights, recommendations, and the demographics that serve their organizations. All participants provide very different functional roles in emergency management during various phases of the emergency management cycle due to their positions and organizational capabilities. Emergency management is an academic and professional discipline that focuses on providing services during all phases of the emergency management cycle. The emergency management cycle includes prevention, mitigation, response, recovery, and preparedness.

Data Collection

On January 13, 2025, I was notified that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the application for the study entitled *Evaluation Of Unmet Needs Of Vulnerable Populations And At-Risk Communities Through Disaster Management Planning*,approval #01-13-25-1106777, involving various participants from community partners. Additional documentation, including signed interviews and survey letters of cooperation from the other community partners, was submitted and confirmed by the Walden IRB before I began data collection with those additional sites. The data collection process was achieved through community partner involvement, which included fifteen participants: ten responded to the Google Form survey, and five responded through interviews. All participants work for an organization that provides emergency management services, and all were general members of the local Voluntary Organizations of Active Disasters. National, State, and Local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster aim to enhance communication, coordination, collaboration, and cooperation among all participating organizations throughout the entire emergency management cycle (National VOAD, 2012, as cited in Jensen, 2024, pp. 25-26). Each interviewee took approximately one hour to answer the questions being asked. Data collection took a month to gather all the necessary data to complete the interview requirement.

The frequency of data collection was influenced by participants' availability, schedules, positions, and agency commitment. The surveys took a few weeks to complete, as many participants were busy and often had to do so after hours or on weekends. Various locations were utilized to conduct the interviews, including the participant's work, virtually, or at the client's organization. Zoom audio recordings were the primary data collection method for the interviews, with the video feature turned off to protect the participants' identities. Once finished, I downloaded the audio recording and uploaded it to Otter AI for editing and transcription. Once completed, the information was uploaded into NVivo for data analysis. The surveys were captured through Google Forms, which allowed all participants to remain anonymous, further protecting the individual's opinions and identity. Once finished, this dataset was also uploaded to NVivo for data analysis and evaluation.

Data Analysis

The data collection process was facilitated through community partner involvement, which involved fifteen participants: ten responded to a Google Form survey, and five participated in in-depth interviews. All participants work for an organization that provides emergency management services, and all are general members of a VOAD. VOAD stands for voluntary organizations active during disaster, which serves as a coalition of organizations striving to improve communication, coordination, collaboration, and cooperation. Each interviewee took approximately one hour to answer the questions and around a month to gather all the necessary data to complete the interview requirement. The frequency of data collection was influenced by participants' availability, schedules, positions, and agency commitment. The surveys took a few weeks to complete, as many participants were busy and often had to do so after hours or on weekends. The interviews were conducted at various locations, including both virtual meetings on Zoom and in-person meetings at the client organization. Survey responses were collected through Google Forms, and interview responses were recorded either virtually or in person via Zoom.

The audio recordings from Zoom were uploaded into OtterAI for transcription and imported into NVivo. Information within Google Forms was exported and then imported into NVivo. NVivo was the platform utilized to analyze the data collected from the interviews and the surveys. NVivo is an online leader in qualitative analysis software that allows users to analyze and code data from video, audio, and text, adding evidence to the qualitative research study (Conti et al., 2021, as cited in Xie et al., 2024, p. 4196). Survey themes and categories were created in NVivo to easily organize collected data, identify trends, and analyze patterns.

Client Services and Data

- Q18 Addressing clients' unmet needs
- Q25 Data-driven decisions

Community Resources & Language Access

- Q23 Resources in multiple languages
- Q24 Addressing language barriers

Demographics & Risk

- Q13 Demographics are most affected

- Q15 Communities with high wildfire severity zones
- Q16 Decreasing associated risk

Disaster Recovery Partnerships & Programs

- Q7 Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters Collaboration
- Q8 Work with Long-Term Recovery Groups
- Q9 After-action reviews or lessons learned are used to strengthen emergency management practices.
- Q12 Disaster programs
- Q14 Gaps in disaster case management contracts

Emergency Response & Performance

- Q1 Fire mitigation
- Q5 Performance metrics to measure community impact
- Q6 Communication amongst other organizations
- Q10 Immediate needs of a survivor
- Q11 Community needs assessment involvement

Evacuation Planning & Emergency Alerts

- Q20 Local evacuation map understanding
- Q21 Emergency alert signups
- Q26 Evacuation zone understanding

Grant & Public Policy

- Q17 Grant writing
- Q19 Review of the federal declaration process

- Q22 Public administrator support

Insurance & Community Vulnerability

- Q2 Primarily underinsured
- Q3 Limited or no insurance
- Q4 Access and functional needs integration into emergency management plans

Whole Community Approach

- Q27 Whole community approach

Five participants were interviewed in person or virtually. Following completion, I created themes during transcription to analyze the collected data. The themes created included client services and data; community resources and language access; demographics and risk; disaster recovery partnerships and programs; emergency response & performance grants and public policy; insurance and community vulnerability; and a whole-community approach. From here, I went through each hour-long transcription and assigned specific quotes /codes to the different themes stated above. During the review of the surveys and interviews, an examination was conducted to identify discrepant cases. The majority of all the responses aligned with the topic of the question. The answers of the participants were slightly different based on their profession, personal experiences, and areas of expertise. Qualities of discrepant cases included answers that were not aligned with the majority of responses. Examples can include the majority of person affected by a disaster may state that they were overwhelmed when their home burned down. Responses stating that they were prepared for this incident would be classified as a discrepant case within this study. Quotes/codes were assigned to appropriate themes based on the topics being discussed.

Findings

The participants involved in the study provided fascinating answers through surveys and one-on-one interviews. The evaluation and recommendations from the surveys presented findings and actions that individuals, families, and communities can carry out to increase community resiliency levels while decreasing associated risks. Respondents all agreed that homeowners can take action around their homes and property to reduce wildfire risks. This includes, but is not limited to, creating and maintaining a defensible space. Achieving wildfire resilience requires the participation of all community members, from public administrators to individual homeowners. Community-based organizations are key to building resilience following a disaster due to their trusted relationships amongst the affected populations, addressing the emerging disaster recovery needs (Drennan & Morrissey, 2019, p. 333). A whole-community approach is needed. Efforts to share information could be more widespread. Word of mouth and social media may not be reaching our most vulnerable community members. Mailers and pre-disaster outreach to vulnerable communities are critical. The whole community approach is similar to the "no wrong door" policy, which takes a step towards disaster preparedness and resiliency in hopes of lessening the need for disaster response and recovery.

A whole-community approach model emphasizes the importance of a shared sense of responsibility in addressing associated risks, which involves emergency managers, public administrators, and community leaders working together in a collective effort to prepare for and recover from disasters (Berg et al., 2014, pp. 281-282). A Whole Community Approach would be a collaborative effort to prepare for and respond to disasters. We see a mix throughout CA - some areas have a great whole community approach, while others are more one-sided, usually Disaster Case Management Program doing the heavy lifting to engage the local community, often with little success. Everyone is on the same page, working together and trying their best. All members within a community take an active role in decreasing risk through community action. Better together. We are also proactively building community in some rural areas to help them take ownership of lessons learned and support local leadership. All communities, regardless of race, language, age, ability, or geographic region, are considered in preparedness plans, response, and recovery efforts. A whole community approach is all non-profits, governmental agencies, private businesses, and individuals working towards a common goal of preparedness and resiliency. Include government, schools & universities, non-profits, civic groups, houses of worship, corporate America, hospitals, and the local VOAD working together to build a plan that can be carried out without getting in the way of each other's mission.

Public administrators can best support recovery by managing expectations and providing a unified message, such as information on donations and where to seek help. They should also move quickly to secure funding to support the recovery of community members. Typically, financial support is allocated to governmental infrastructure, and the recovery of human needs is often left to non-profits. A successful recovery from a disaster requires support from all levels, both public and private. Decreasing community risk levels requires actions that include, but are not limited to, hazard mitigation efforts, wildfire fuel reduction projects, purchasing and maintaining homeowners' insurance, understanding emergency alerts, and familiarizing oneself with evacuation maps. The data collected suggests that additional efforts surrounding evacuation zone maps and emergency alerts among communities in high-fire severity zones could be highly beneficial. Uninsured homes in California were also a concern; all participants stated that persons affected by a disaster were underinsured, had limited coverage, or had no coverage at all.

Many individuals affected by wildfires have not had insurance for generations, as the land has been passed down for years, or many families thought someone else within the family was taking care of it. Due to the increased frequency and severity of wildfires in California, many insurance companies have halted the creation of new insurance policies in wildfire-prone areas, making coverage unaffordable for homeowners, who are then opting for the California Fair Plan, a state-mandated basic insurance coverage (Auer, 2024, p.461). For the California FAIR Plan to provide insurance policies as a last resort, it requires insurance companies to actively participate in the state initiative to provide basic coverage for individuals who cannot afford insurance (Feinman, 2025, p. 4). Recommendations for this specific section included additional education about homeowners' policies, shopping around for insurance, and collaborating with the Fire Safe Council to achieve a community National Fire Protection Association Firewise designation, which can lower insurance rates for an entire community. The National Fire Protection Association's Firewise designation has been the standard for wildfire mitigation and readiness, with insurance companies often offering discounts to communities upon successful evaluation of a community's wildfire risk assessment (Berry et al., 2016, p.196).

Other suggestions included working with different national non-profit organizations that specialize in insurance recommendations. Access and functional need populations must be advocated for and included in emergency management plans to ensure their needs are met. Populations with various limitations must be considered during all phases of the emergency management cycle. These populations can include, but are not limited to, persons with access and functional needs, limited income, language barriers, mobility issues, and transportation issues. Advocating for disaster planning, readiness, and response that considers the needs of individuals with access and functional needs reduces social vulnerability and enhances community resilience (Stough, 2015, p. 144). Overcoming language barriers among people affected by a disaster is accomplished through hiring and retaining bilingual staff and outsourcing translation services.

We hire language interpreters (for spoken info) and translators (for written info), we have granted to English language learning programs, and we have given to capacity building and A Just Economy/Economic Development of people who speak both the local languages needed as well as English; in our service area, to the best of our knowledge, the top three languages after English, Spanish, Hmong, and American Sign Language. We use an Access and Functional Needs Specialist. It has not been an issue for us as we can communicate in these primary languages. We are unaware of the population in the burn scar who do not speak Spanish or English. We partner with non-profit organizations that provide information and resources in the languages spoken by their communities. Typically, we use Google Translate or ask a bilingual family member for assistance. We work with local organizations that translate, as California has a diverse range of languages.

Participants also shared information on how their organization monitors organizational goals and objectives. Performance metrics to measure project performance and community impact can consist of community feedback loops, data collection from community needs assessments, program deliverables, and client satisfaction scores. These key performance indicators serve as the foundation of these organizations and can increase the probability of achieving desired results. The information captured from the survey also displayed insight into communication methods among emergency management community organizations. Importance was stressed that the communication systems must be battle-ready and tested routinely to ensure methods can be utilized before, during, and after a disaster.

Such systems include the use of Slack, virtual meetings, text messaging, phone trees, in-person meetings, Starlink, and amateur radios. The success of the participant's work amongst disaster-affected communities was often credited to the VOAD and the LTRG. After-action reviews can also be beneficial for the organizations they serve, as well as for those who are members of the VOAD and LTRG. Conducting after-action reviews is a widely adopted practice to evaluate lessons learned within emergency management, identifying areas for improvement (Parker, 2020, p. 580). These after-action reviews serve as a reflection and evaluation of the situation being addressed. Such reviews can improve response times and serve as a roadmap for preparedness planning, training staff, and delivering services.

Addressing the immediate needs of persons affected by human-caused or natural disasters presented valuable insight. Recommendations include food, water, shelter, security, safety, psychological support, love, family reunification, and an understanding that everyone's immediate needs may be influenced by cultural, physical, mental, and emotional limitations. All participants stated that financial assistance, in the form of grants, donations, and corporate sponsorships, often supports the program's work, enabling services to be delivered and sustained. No single emergency management organization has the expertise to provide all of the necessary resources to deal with a disaster, but through interagency collaboration, a more effective response can be deployed (Song & Seo, 2025, p.51).

Many individuals involved in the study often conduct community needs assessments to gain valuable insights into changes within the communities they serve. These community needs assessments also provide useful insights into a diverse range of demographics. Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), renters, people who are homeless/houseless, people with mobility and/or developmental and intellectual disabilities, low-income folks, isolated seniors, the remote rural/frontier folks, people living in one road in/out communities, foster kids and adults who were foster kids disconnected from supports, people in high-risk wildfire, flood, tsunami, earthquake areas because they are more affordable areas, people for whom English is not a primary language (including people who use American Sign Language and many of those who are deaf/blind), and people new to the area/visiting the area who are disconnected from local connections, systems, and geographies. Addressing these unmet needs can be accomplished through a wide variety of methods. Immediate needs are often discussed by providing essential supplies to evacuation shelters, local assistance centers, and disaster recovery centers.

Delivering disaster case management services is a primary method preferred by many organizations. Referrals to other organizations have been used as a form of wrap-around services to address specific disaster recovery needs. Advocating for clients' unmet needs, roundtables enable funders to hear about the financial gaps in individual recovery plans and potentially fund financial shortcomings to achieve the goals outlined in those plans. Every demographic is affected similarly by disasters. If someone of wealth loses everything they own and someone of lower income loses everything they own, they are both equally traumatized. The difference lies in recovery and the resources available to someone of means versus someone of lower income. Populations in lower socioeconomic status rely more heavily on supportive services, and a disruption or lack of such services following a disaster often increases the risk of adverse health reactions (Shri et al., 2025, p. 2).

The majority of these populations live within high-fire severity zones. Services offered by participant organizations include Disaster Case Management, disaster plan development, long-term recovery support, meal service, hydration, emotional and spiritual care, donations management, immediate financial assistance (gift cards), and long-term recovery case management. Services are provided during all phases of a disaster. From registering survivors to collaborating on response needs through home rebuilds. Rebuilding after hurricanes, floods, wildfires, and many other disasters can take years to complete due to limited resources, infrastructure damage, and rising costs of rebuilding materials (Rosenthal, Stover, & Haar, 2021, p. 3).

Data captured through interviews presented many interesting findings. All of the participants interviewed have been affected by federally declared and undeclared disasters within the region. Many have personally gone through the tragedy of losing their homes to wildfires within the area. Many also reported having to evacuate their homes repeatedly throughout the years. Being a survivor themselves gives them purpose and the ability to connect even further with communities impacted, as well as with issues they personally and professionally have dealt with. By working for various organizations that provide emergency management services before, during, and after critical incidents occur, they can strive to implement actions that mitigate the issues they face.
Community stakeholder involvement is crucial to the success and effectiveness of deploying resources during and after a disaster has occurred. This can include food banks, school districts, public utility districts, community-based organizations, and churches. All members of a community have a responsibility to look out for one another and work together to enhance community preparedness and readiness levels.

The VOADs are often utilized for community stakeholder involvement, as each county VOAD comprises organizations from the federal, state, tribal, local, public, private, faith-based, and non-governmental sectors. The trusted messengers within a community are the community’s lifeline because they are the ones that people turn to during times of crisis. During times of crisis, nonprofits serve as trusted messengers through social media channels, disseminating critical information among diverse audiences (An, 2025, p. 197). Being a trusted messenger takes time, credibility, trust, and commitment to service. One participant stated that often, following a human-caused or natural disaster, communities can experience a sense of unity. One participant noted that community stakeholders are not just elected officials but also credible and reliable non-governmental organizations that can quickly access resources to populations most in need due to their deep connections and relationships.

Public service announcements are addressed through a newly launched county-ready site. This site provides valuable insights on how the county can prepare for, respond to, and recover from service disruptions, human-caused disasters, and natural disasters. Action within an informal crisis communication plan includes consulting with the county Disaster Council and assigning a representative based on specific public concerns, environmental health issues, hospital needs, road closures, and crime scene investigations. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Crisis Emergency Risk Communication framework, dissemination of incident information needs to vary throughout various stages of the situation (Hu et al., 2024, p. 2). Public information officers can also be assigned to particular incidents to address various concerns. If necessary, a joint information center can be established to combat misinformation about incidents.

Other organizations assign different personnel to fulfill this role during an active incident based on complexity and staff availability. One participant noted that, over the years, public service announcements have been a primary focus of the department, and the organization is actively working to establish written policies and procedures. Public administrators and government messages are not always trusted among various communities within the region. During a disaster, social media becomes a significant source of critical information that the public relies on to receive and share disaster-related information (Kim et al., 2022, p. 649). Consequently, messages about resources must come from churches, parishes, fire chiefs, and police chiefs, as they are trusted.

The frequency and severity of disasters within the county every year continue to affect a wide variety of populations and communities. Every disaster is unique, and the needs of each community within the county vary significantly. Some communities have a very heavy tribal, Hmong, and Hispanic culture. Every community handles trauma differently; some do not want to receive recovery resources, as some cultures are very independent. Family support networks that can aid in resource sharing, emotional support, risk reduction, and group preparedness efforts increase the probability of increasing resilience levels (Wu et al., 2025, p. 12). At the same time, some cultures may be hesitant to access resources at disaster recovery centers due to concerns about immigration. When a disaster occurs within the county, elderly populations are often the most severely affected, and those with limited income face additional hardships. Both of these demographics may depend on supportive programs within the county, and if these services are disrupted during a disaster, many face additional adversity. Some reactions are quite interesting as some individuals go into fight, flight, or freeze during a stressful situation.

One participant stated that trauma is universal, and regardless of how much money you have, pain and suffering are still present, and navigating through the recovery process is complex, even with or without insurance. Every year, when smoke fills the air, many different populations become anxious or resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms to escape, as wildfire alerts can trigger a distressing response. Human and natural disasters, which are considered traumatic events, can cause individuals and families to experience severe stress, resulting in increased probability of anxiety, depression, and the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (Tuncer et al., 2025, p.117). One participant mentioned that many communities within the area have experienced generational trauma and have highly adverse childhood experiences. Working with local unmet need roundtables allowed them to see trauma amongst individuals firsthand. An unmet needs roundtable is a coalition in which a disaster case manager advocates on behalf of the client for financial assistance to fulfill a disaster recovery gap. One client was under so much stress that the clients faced physical illnesses such as significant weight loss, high blood pressure, and loss of hair.

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act is a federal policy designed to assist state and local governments that have been affected by a disaster. The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act is a federal emergency management public policy that provides authorization to provide federal disaster assistance, which also includes the ability to deploy federal resources to perform life-saving measures (Lucie, 2014, p. 2). The release of essential federal funding to areas impacted is a complex and timely process that can significantly impact the community's recovery, as many of these recovery demands are placed locally until federal assistance is received. Initiating long-term disaster recovery efforts as soon as the incident occurs can mitigate long-term trauma, such as through immediate disaster case management. Subject matter experts have argued that loss of life caused by a disaster should be a significant deciding factor for a possible presidential declaration (Lindsay, 2017, p. 22). This can be accomplished through agreements with local Community Foundations, procurement contracts, or corporate sponsorships until federal contracts are secured.

One participant stated that we do not self-dispatch to incidents but only respond when the community specifically requests services relating to insurance fraud and issues. From here, we educate, advocate, and appeal to issues that survivors may be facing. One non-profit stated that navigating recovery issues can be complex, as many families have had the same land or home for generations, and through that, the insurance may not have been prepared or may never have been educated on the changes in policies or coverage. Some incidents of families moving to a different part of the region just to be affected by another disaster create additional layers of trauma. In the aftermath of a disaster, many may develop symptoms of depression, anxiety, anger, and social isolation, which can be a direct result of traumatic exposure such as war, community violence, or disasters (Şahin & Okan, 2024, p.2).

Many participants are concerned that the restructuring of FEMA) is concerning, as many wildfires that have devastated communities have never been federally declared disasters. Not being federally declared can limit financial resources, public awareness, and essential funding for public and individual assistance. The same message is being echoed that disasters start and end locally, which is true, but without funds, it is almost impossible to achieve. Messaging from partners at the federal level has indicated that more responsibility for disaster relief response and recovery will be shifted to local communities and states. Fire victims who applied for individual fire assistance, such as disaster relief grants administered by FEMA, faced difficulties through the application process (Rosenthal, Stover, & Haar, 2021, p. 13). Disasters not only impact individuals and families emotionally and financially, but also often have a cascading effect on the local economy (Rosenthal, Stover, & Haar, 2021, p. 15).

This is concerning as many communities within the region have very high social vulnerability scores, live within high fire severity zones, and are compounding community trauma each year. One participant stated that following a major disaster in which homes, apartments, and trailers are destroyed, many people compete for housing opportunities in neighboring counties and cities, which drastically increases demand and drives up rental costs. Disaster survivors within lower socio-economic backgrounds, which can include, but are not limited to, lower income, communities of color, and individuals with access and functional needs, are most at risk for facing housing insecurity (Rosenthal, Stover, & Haar, 2021, p. 3). Providing emergency cash assistance to survivors is crucial for navigating the road to recovery, which includes securing essential items such as food, water, and shelter. Having predesignated funds readily available before immediate or long-term disaster case management is implemented could fill the service gap among federal contracts. Volunteer Disaster Case Management is another option that one participant stated was an effective method of providing services before federal contracts arrived. The team of ten volunteers was able to aid countless survivors before employment was a consideration.

The data collected from these subject matter experts presented information that could greatly benefit the client organization. The frequency and severity of naturally occurring and human-caused disasters continue to cause community trauma that compounds each year. Every culture, community, and individual has different trauma reactions, and providers must understand that supportive services need to be deployed to areas most at risk. Implementing core competencies training courses and staff training logs for trauma-informed care, psychological first aid, and traumatology can equip staff with the necessary tools to mitigate adverse reactions. Having a structured professional development track in emergency management creates cross-training and gives more providers. Cross-training enables personnel to understand a wide range of topics, thereby increasing the effectiveness of service delivery. This flexible and fluid workforce enhances the ability to adapt to provide wrap-around services that can address immediate, short-term, and long-term recovery goals. According to the recommendations, the client organization should consider alternative funding and staffing methods to expedite the implementation of disaster case management programs. Many geographical areas within the client's organization’s jurisdiction. Doing so can decrease long-term recovery issues, overcome financial burdens, and increase the probability of achieving goals within their disaster recovery plan.

Other options include having a local community foundation sponsor or fund immediate disaster case management programs. Alternatives can include having procurement contracts or memoranda of understanding with state and local governments, which can ensure that survivors receive immediate recovery services. The client organization should consider including volunteers in disaster case management before the release of federal contracts. Decreasing the associated risk within the geographical area requires a whole-community approach, meaning participation from public administrators to homeowners. Decreasing risk also requires communication from trusted communication partners.

Deliverables and Recommendations

The data collected from individuals working in the local community in the field of emergency management presented many ideas and thoughts on how the client organization can address its administrative problems. Recommendations from the surveys included that increasing community resiliency levels requires participation from the entire community, and socially vulnerable populations often lack the financial capabilities to pay for or maintain home or rental insurance. Data-driven decision-making and constant communication with community stakeholders are essential. Launching immediate disaster case management can be challenging to achieve, especially when the impacted area is undergoing local and state damage assessments. Following this, local officials and the governor may advocate for a state and federal declaration. If the State of California identifies this need and the governor approves a state declaration, the state can push it forward for a presidential review.

The federal presidential declaration evaluation process lacks a set of standards for approving a federal declaration. A presidentially declared disaster declaration request must be made by a tribal representative or the state governor, which must include a preliminary damage assessment, the impact on citizens, and an explanation of how the incident exceeds the response capabilities of local, county, and state governments (Lindsay, 2017, p. 2). This proposal to the president includes comprehensive information that must be followed at both the state and tribal levels; however, the decision to approve federal funding can be situational-dependent. If approved, federal contracts could reach the community-based organization six months to a year later, creating a significant gap in service. To address this, several participants have suggested various avenues that the client organization could implement to bridge the service gap. Suggestions also included maintaining financial reserves, establishing master service agreements, and securing procurement contracts with state and county emergency management organizations. Having contracts and MOUs in place with local, county, and state government organizations allows the client organization to provide immediate disaster case management services until federal contracts arrive.

Understanding the frequency and severity of hazards, combined with public awareness campaigns, enables communities to take actions that increase their resilience levels while reducing recovery timelines. Community and individual action items can include creating defensible space around the home in the wildland-urban interface, purchasing rental and homeowners’ insurance, and collaborating with a partner organization to assess short-term, immediate, and long-term risks. Recommendations include utilizing a post-disaster needs assessment, EMAP accreditation, Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication (CERC), and procurement.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The data collected amongst the participants was deemed credible and was verified through a comprehensive selection and vetting process. All participants were recruited due to their extensive background in emergency management within the region and are members of the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters or Long-Term Recovery Groups. All members signed letters of cooperation, understanding the study's intent. All understood the administrative challenges of meeting the needs of vulnerable populations and at-risk communities during disaster response, particularly when there are delays in government contracts for disaster case management. The research was conducted on those who volunteered freely.

Disclosures even stated that being in this study could involve some risk of minor discomforts that may be encountered in daily life, such as sharing sensitive information. For example, sharing personal experiences on wildfire severity zones may trigger individuals as the severity of wildfires in the region continues to increase. The credibility of the data being collected was verified through a wide variety of methods. This included analyzing peer-reviewed journals at Walden University, filtering the search by keywords, and looking at the publication dates for relevance. Administrators participating in surveys, one-on-one interviews, and group interviews are either Directors or Officers, credible to the data being collected.

Based on my review of your research proposal, all participants have given their permission for me to conduct the study entitled "Evaluation of Unmet Needs of Vulnerable Populations and At-Risk Communities Through Disaster Management Planning." As part of this study, I was authorized to recruit and administer surveys and interviews with all Institutional Review Board-approved participants. Individuals' participation was voluntary and at their discretion. We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing contact information.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in ProQuest. I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies and procedures. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and will not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty or staff without permission from the Walden University IRB. Based on my review of your research proposal, I grant permission for you to conduct the study entitled "Evaluation of Unmet Needs of Vulnerable Populations and At-Risk Communities Through Disaster Management Planning" with the specified participants.

As part of this study, I authorize you to recruit and conduct interviews about our organization and disaster management planning. Individuals' participation was voluntary and at their discretion. We understand that our organization's responsibilities include [providing contact information and allowing interviews to be conducted on-site. I understand that the student will not include our organization's name in the doctoral project report that is published in ProQuest. I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies and procedures. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and will not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty or staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

In addition, administrators from within the organization involved in the data collection process experienced these administrative issues well before the establishment of the Disaster Services department, indicating a prolonged involvement. Transferability included a thick description and variation in the selection of participants. Thick description details included the environment in which the one-on-one and group interviews took place, as well as the social and cultural values prevalent in the area. Variations in participation selection will consist of persons with diverse backgrounds and experience with disasters in the region. The selection process took into account experiences and perspectives on the administrative issue. Dependability was accomplished by integrating audit trails and triangulation in the research design. Audit trails will include maintaining records of the research process and data collection. Triangulation was achieved through the analysis of information gathered using various methods, identifying similarities and differences among the collected data. Confirmability was achieved by utilizing previous methods to validate the data collection process. This includes audit trails, thick descriptions, triangulation, and member checking, as described earlier.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

One of the study's strengths is that the participants involved in the data collection process have extensive experience in emergency management and represent a diverse range of marginalized populations. Participants are members of local VOADs and LTRGs, and they have continued to provide supportive services throughout all phases of the emergency management cycle. The emergency management cycle includes actions to prepare at-risk communities and populations, mitigate associated risks, respond to the immediate needs of survivors, and aid individuals and families in achieving their disaster recovery plan goals. Weaknesses within the study include that the participants involved are local. Disasters start and end locally, which allows responding organizations to identify and address needs. With that, someone trying to replicate the study in a different area of the country is more than likely going to get different answers based on cultural needs, regional disasters, resource availability, funding, and levels of VOAD involvement.

Limitations of the study include that many of the participants answering the questions are subject matter experts and work for organizations that provide supportive services before, during, and after a disaster has occurred, as well as have personally been through a disaster. This experience has driven many of them to serve in a capacity that allows them to give back to their local communities. If this study were conducted among a population that had not experienced disasters, the answers might be more research-based, rather than relying on personal experience, whether professional or personal. These answers may not have reflected key lessons learned from experiencing a disaster, both on an organizational and a personal level. Expected results included many agreeing on a whole-community approach to achieve the desired results of increasing community resiliency levels while decreasing associated risks.

Unexpected results included the time it took to capture the data through surveys and interviews, as many are very active in disaster response work around the region as well as addressing organizational priorities. Having to schedule and reschedule due to ongoing changes locally was challenging to overcome. Additional limitations included that many responding individuals, who have been providing supportive services for years, often do not take the time to perform self-care, as they feel a moral, legal, and ethical responsibility to serve those in need. Many are guilty of not taking enough time off.

Summary

Due to the importance of the study and the complex administrative issues the client organization is facing, data collection and comprehensive analysis were critical in determining solutions. Upon Institutional Review Board Approval, a total of fifteen participants were involved in the study. Five were engaged through interviews, and the other ten responded through a Google Form sheet. All participants' information was protected through audio-only recordings and a survey format that did not capture identifying details. All participants are employed at organizations that are general members of VOAD. Once the information was captured, analysis was conducted in NVivo, breaking down the classifications into themes and categories. The findings presented several recommendations on how the client organization can implement strategies to identify and address multiple hazards and issues within the region. Some suggestions include, but are not limited to, decreasing the risk required by the community, which is the responsibility of the entire community.

An ambassador or trusted figure can advance this initiative, but it does require participation from public administrators and homeowners. Addressing the gap in disaster case management services can be accomplished through volunteer disaster case management, interns, immediate disaster case management, procurement contracts, and gap funding from community foundations. Planning accordingly based on historical trends can present additional opportunities to be proactive in deploying disaster recovery services quickly and without delay. The Institutional Review Board has approved data collection among subject matter experts, resulting in findings that can be used to aid those most in need for many years to come. The strengths and limitations of the study can be interpreted in two ways, as many participants involved in the study have personally been affected by a disaster. The collective trauma among the participants offers vibrant and raw responses compared to someone who may have researched trauma responses through research. Certain bases may have been integrated into their responses, as many are from the same region that continues to experience a higher frequency than the national average of naturally occurring hazards.

Section 5 includes a dissemination plan that describes how the professional administrative study is going to be disseminated through online publications. This discusses dissemination through the Walden University Library, ProQuest, and ScholarWorks. These online databases allow users to view the study, providing valuable insights and information on how the study can be replicated to obtain similar results. The board of directors of this organization often attends monthly board education meetings, which give employees an opportunity to discuss grants, projects, and organizational changes. A date and time will be scheduled with the Board to ensure recommendations within the study are heard, equipping the leadership team with the necessary steps to improve the organization and the department. Implementing such recommendations can increase the probability of achieving department sustainability. A conclusion and summary describe how this research study can be used to create positive social change in a wide variety of academic disciplines and career fields.

Section 5: Dissemination Plan and Conclusion

Dissemination Plan

The findings from this professional administrative study have been disseminated through the Walden University Library, specifically via ProQuest and ScholarWorks. In addition to ProQuest and ScholarWorks, the findings and recommendations for the client organization will be presented through a presentation. This presentation will include key leadership positions within the organization as well as the board of directors. The organization's leadership team will comprise the executive director, chief financial officer, chief operations officer, development director, assistant director of human resources, and mental health director. The data collected from participants who are subject matter experts included valuable insight into what actions can be taken to solve the administrative problem. The information presented in the study recommends alternative funding solutions to bridge the service gap while waiting for disaster case management contracts, which can take 6 months to 1 year to arrive.

These strategies include, but are not limited to, procurement contracts, immediate disaster case management, fee-for-service models, sponsorships, and volunteer disaster case management. In addition to these findings, the client organization will be presented with deliverables that include a logic model, as outlined in the professional administrative study. A post-disaster needs assessment and a disaster recovery plan will also be delivered, further enhancing the department's capacity to serve individuals and families most affected by service disruptions and disasters.

Conclusions

The information presented in this professional administrative study can be highly beneficial to a wide range of community-based organizations seeking to create sustainable, positive social change. Many organizations operating in emergency management can apply the knowledge gained from the findings and recommendations to create similar solutions, thereby mitigating long-term trauma and fostering sustainable outcomes. Public policymakers and elected officials should invest in reinforcing a whole community approach through increased participation and communication in local disaster coalitions, focusing on exchanging capabilities, resources, and emergency planning (Gazley & Cash, 2024, p. 287). Communities and survivors of a human-caused or natural disaster have often lost everything and need services that can be deployed quickly.

Additionally, similar organizations can develop a logic model, create a disaster recovery plan, and implement a post-disaster needs assessment to increase community impact. Creating and implementing a logic model can facilitate program planning, evaluation, reporting, and effective program implementation. A comprehensive disaster recovery plan enhances the likelihood of achieving organizational, community, and individual disaster recovery goals. A post-disaster needs assessment is a systematic process used to identify unmet needs and determine the necessary methods to address both simple and complex recovery issues. Federal public policy changes are underway, which can hinder essential recovery, thereby placing additional responsibility on state and local communities. All disasters start locally, and the information presented in this professional administrative study demonstrates the resiliency of communities and the importance of embracing a whole community approach during all phases of a disaster.

Summary

Social vulnerability within the client organization's jurisdiction is extremely high, and numerous populations continue to face significant economic hardships and challenges in accessing and meeting their basic needs. During disasters and critical service disruptions, the health and safety of at-risk populations decrease, resulting in higher mortality rates when compared to the general population (Pacheco Barzallo et al., 2024, p. 537). Human-caused or natural disasters amplify existing social vulnerabilities, hardships, and inequalities (Wisner et al., 2004, as cited in Him & Esendemir, 2025, p. 203; Campbell, 2007a, as cited in Him & Esendemir, 2025, p. 203). Limited supportive services before any disaster are a lifeline, and a disruption of essential services makes recovery extremely hard to achieve. Having immediate disaster case management launched within the same month as the initial impact of damage to critical infrastructure, disruption of essential services, and heartbreak can save lives. Having this study published in ProQuest and ScholarWorks elevates its impact on a national stage, allowing all communities to benefit from the recommendations within this professional administrative study. The leadership team and the board of directors will soon be equipped with the knowledge that is needed to create everlasting positive social change across the region for many years to come.

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Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire

The research was only possible with the recommendations from my Chair and Committee Members. With your participation, this study is feasible for community and local administrators. The purpose of these interview questionnaires is to provide valuable insights from personnel from local emergency management organizations. The interview questions will focus on community stakeholders, public relations, public policy, the psychological impact of the disaster, community trauma, personal and professional experiences, organizational emergency response, and recovery operations.

1. Have you been impacted or been affected by a disaster?
2. Please describe the importance of community stakeholder involvement in emergency management.
3. How does your organization release public service announcements during an active incident?
4. Does your organization have crisis communication policies and procedures?
5. Does your organization have a designated spokesperson during a disaster?
6. Have you found various cultures have similar psychological reactions?
7. Are you familiar with the Robert T Stafford Act?
8. Has the frequency of human-caused and natural disasters increased throughout the years, resulting in increased community trauma?
9. Have you been a part of a spiritual, emotional, and wellness committee?

10. During emergency response and recovery efforts, what populations and demographics are most affected following a disaster?
11. What adverse health reactions are your clients experiencing from being impacted by disasters in the region?
12. What actions must occur to make communities safer and more resilient?
13. What resources does your organization distribute to combat post-traumatic stress disorder?
14. Has your region experienced donor fatigue?
15. Do most of our community understand your local alert and warning systems and messaging? Evacuation orders, warnings, or maps?
16. Is the presidential declaration process for federal assistance sufficient?
17. How does your organization fund your disaster programs?
18. Should disaster case management contracts to community-based organizations be released sooner? If so, when?
19. Are you familiar with the Emergency Assistance Act?
20. Who are the trusted messengers in your community?
21. How can non-governmental organizations deliver disaster case management services to fill the gap in service until federal contracts arrive?
22. How has the frequency of disasters in the area affected survivors' mental health?
23. What have been some of the most significant barriers that have prolonged individual and community recovery in the areas most affected by a disaster?

24. What are the top three short-term, immediate, and long-term disaster recovery needs?
25. How does your organization share information and collaborate with organizations engaged in similar disaster operations?
26. What can public administrators do to best support a community's recovery after a disaster?
27. What is one of the best ways to share disaster experiences?

Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire

1. What can homeowners do to mitigate hazards around their property?
2. Are homes that have been affected by disasters in the area primarily underinsured?
3. Do the majority of clients that you serve after a disaster have limited or no insurance coverage for rebuilds?
4. Are access and functional needs populations integrated into local emergency management plans?
5. What performance metrics does your organization use to measure community impact?
6. How do community organizations currently communicate with one another?
7. Does your organization work with a local volunteer organization that is active during a disaster?
8. Does your organization work with local volunteer long-term recovery groups?
9. How can after-action reviews or lessons learned be used to strengthen existing emergency management practices?
10. What is the immediate need of a survivor?
11. Has your organization been involved in a community needs assessment?
12. What disaster-related services does your organization offer?
13. What demographics are most affected by disasters in the area?

14. Oftentimes, many organizations may not receive disaster case management contracts until a year after a disaster has been declared. How can the client organization address this 1-year gap in service?
15. Is the majority of rural communities in your service area in high wildfire severity zones?
16. What can we do locally to decrease associated risk?
17. Does your organization write grants to support the program?
18. How does your community address clients' unmet needs?
19. Do you believe the federal declaration process for a disaster is accomplished promptly?
20. Does your community understand local evacuation maps?
21. Does most of your community know how to sign up for emergency alerts?
22. What can public administrators do to best support a community's recovery after a disaster?
23. Does your organization provide emergency preparedness, response, and recovery resources in multiple languages?
24. How does your organization address language barriers?
25. How does your organization utilize emergency management resources to make data-driven decisions?
26. Does your community understand evacuation zones?
27. How would you describe a whole community approach?