

BEST PRACTICES FOR ETHICAL POST-DISASTER COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

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This check sheet is intended to assist investigators who are conducting field research with communities affected by disasters. This check sheet draws on several sources, including methodological writings and case studies from previous research, and offers key considerations to help advance ethical post-disaster engagement.

» What is community outreach?

- Community-situated*: Research topic is of practical relevance to the participating community (as defined by the community members) and is carried out in community-based settings.
- Collaborative*: Control over the research project is shared by researchers and community members.
- Action-oriented*: The process and results are meant to lead to positive social outcomes and to promote social equity for community members.

» How can researchers engage in effective community outreach?

- Pre-Engagement
 - Consult with community leaders and/or local researchers prior to beginning the research project. In a post-disaster setting, when community leaders may be overwhelmed, it is especially important that researchers be prepared to slow down or work at a pace that is appropriate for the community context.
 - Consider including local community leaders as partners in the research team *from the outset*. Involve key informants and stakeholders in decision-making roles from research design to implementation to analysis. Too often, community leaders are only asked to help with participant recruitment. Effective engagement moves beyond this step to include community members throughout the entire research lifecycle.
 - After a major disaster, many researchers may travel to the affected area, leading to potential redundancy and community fatigue. Local partners can help with constructing new research questions and identifying new participants.
 - Conduct background research into the historical, social, and political context of the community.
 - Researchers should also seek to understand community experiences and perceptions regarding academic research.
 - Be aware that community leaders may be mistrustful of research; as such, this stage can have several challenges. For more details on how to navigate these ethical concerns and challenges, see: Bromley et al. 2015.
 - Keep in mind: No one approach to engagement will be successful in all communities. This is why it is important that researchers familiarize themselves with the particular context of each community prior to initiating engagement.

- For more information on how to conduct culturally competent research in hazards and disaster contexts, please visit the [CONVERGE Cultural Competence in Hazards and Disaster Research Training Module](#).

Engagement

- Organize regular meetings with community partners for sustained communication and continued relationship building. These meetings are useful for shaping the research design, formulating methods and research materials, recruiting participants, collecting and analyzing data, and strategizing for dissemination.
- As appropriate, plan activities with community members more broadly in addition to community partners. These activities can range from traditional community meetings to presentations on your research. This is especially important after a disaster when community members are more vulnerable.
 - Disasters tend to reproduce already-existing inequalities. As such, researchers must prioritize making these activities accessible and useful to community members.
 - * For more information on social vulnerability, please visit the [CONVERGE Social Vulnerability and Disasters Training Module](#).
- Ensure that any planned research activities are conducted in trusted community locations and at times that will maximize accessibility for a diverse group of community members.
- Sustained engagement allows researchers to address issues that community members may raise, to learn more about the community, and to develop locally-informed knowledge.

Assessment, Reflection, and Feedback

- Plan daily or regular check-ins with community partners. Use check-ins to share information on outreach, to reflect on progress, and to adjust participant recruitment and data collection strategies accordingly.
- Plan daily or regular check-ins with community members—through home visits, for example—to properly adjust research strategies based on community needs. Be aware, however, that community members may be overwhelmed during their recovery after a disaster. Many may no longer have a home. Researchers must be willing to work with community members to make their participation as manageable as possible by being flexible, and if necessary, providing transportation and a safe location to meet.

Ongoing Maintenance

- Community outreach is about establishing and maintaining long-term relationships with community partners. Continuously work to ensure equitable participation and information sharing with all partners in the research process. This approach opens communication and enables mutual leadership.
- Be prepared to put in a lot of time and effort to develop and maintain relationships.
- Reciprocity is key in any research setting, and may be especially important in post-disaster settings when many community members may have experienced extreme social and material losses and may be experiencing distress.
 - For more information on disaster mental health, and mental health resources, please visit the [CONVERGE Disaster Mental Health Training Module](#).

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

For CONVERGE Training Modules focused on Cultural Competence, Social Vulnerability and Disasters, Disaster Mental Health, and other relevant topics, see: <https://converge.colorado.edu/resources/training-modules>.

For additional advice on carrying out ethical and rigorous research, see the CONVERGE Extreme Events Research Check Sheets series at: <https://converge.colorado.edu/resources/check-sheets>.

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