Sobrante Park CORE  
Case Study  
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Executive Summary

The Sobrante Park community prioritized Disaster Preparedness in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina. Shortly thereafter, the community became involved with CORE (Communities of Oakland Respond to Emergency), which provided a series of disaster preparedness classes as well as opportunities to respond during Mock Disaster Drills. This study aimed to assess both the level of preparedness the Sobrante Park community has achieved and also the ways in which engagement in emergency preparedness activities serves as a vehicle to achieving broader community capacity. Framed by 10 key dimensions of community capacity, as outlined by Goodman and colleagues (1998), this study illustrates the successes, strengths and challenges of the Sobrante Park CORE.

The methods for this case study relied heavily on a purposive sample of key informant interviews of Sobrante Park residents who have been involved with CORE and also with the CORE staff who work with the City of Oakland. In addition to key informant interviews, archival documents from past evaluations of Community Capacity Building in Sobrante Park were reviewed in order to provide history, context, and some baseline indicators regarding social capital and residents’ perceptions of their emergency preparedness.

CORE was founded by the Oakland Fire Department Office of Emergency Services with the aim of building community skills and leadership so that community residents feel empowered to respond competently to emergencies and disasters. Rooted in a belief that neighborhood power comes from within the neighborhood itself, the CORE curriculum emphasizes the importance of community cohesion and knowledge of community resources – both material and human – to respond effectively to disaster situations.

Selected Findings & Lessons Learned

Participation & Leadership

- In 2006, 28 residents graduated from the complete series of CORE trainings and even more participated in the Mock Disaster Drill.
• In 2009, there was not sufficient participation for the group to participate in the city-wide Mock Disaster Drill.

• Changing demographics and a growing number of Spanish-speaking residents highlight the need for a broader participation and leadership among both English and Spanish-speaking residents. The CORE “Commander” is the primary leader in the community, but she recognizes a need to build more leadership throughout the community.

**Skill Building**

• All key informants described concrete skills that they acquired through their participation in CORE:
  
  o First aid
  o CPR
  o Developing a family escape plan
  o Public speaking
  o Organizational skills
  o What to include in an emergency back pack

• Key informants also described how gains in concrete skills helped to boost their confidence regarding how to respond in emergencies.

• Because there have not been refresher trainings within recent years, and because the group did not participate in the most recent Mock Disaster Drill, some residents worry that they will forget the skills that they learned

**Resources**

• Key informants characterized resources as both the material resource itself and also the pathway through which to obtain a resource.

• Pathways identified for obtaining resources included: 1) increased knowledge and 2) relationships with key individuals within the city and county who have access to material resources.

• The Sobrante Park CORE group has not yet been able to leverage many material resources, but the CORE “Commander” mentioned that the group needs equipment such as walkie talkies. The City of Oakland’s CORE Coordinator explained that these types of
materials are typically purchased collectively for the whole community using funds raised by the CORE volunteers for that purpose.

**Social & Inter-organizational Networks**

- Members of the Sobrante Park CORE are also well connected to the other community groups, such as the Resident Action Council, Time Banking, and the Home Owner’s Association.
- Community organizations within Sobrante Park seem to be well connected, but it is not clear whether the relationships among each of these organizations facilitate the creation of other linkages with organizations and resources outside of the immediate community.

**Sense of Community & Community Power**

- Key informants described how participation in community activities, including CORE, RAC, and Time Banking, helps them to learn about the struggles and achievements within the community, such as the planning group that is negotiating with the City and developers in order to renovate Tyrone Carne Park.
- Several key informants described how their involvement in CORE and other CCB activities has deepened their awareness of community issues and has also showed them that they have the power to change their community for the better.
- Because the key informants who participated in this study are involved in a variety of community groups and activities, it is not clear to what degree CORE activities specifically have allowed community members to mobilize around an issue and assert their collective power.

**Conclusions**

As the Sobrante Park CORE works to ensure that the community is prepared for disaster and also to build overall collective power and community capacity, the lessons learned in this case study may serve to highlight areas in which the community has achieved success and areas that have proven challenging. Identifying the community’s successes and challenges will allow future efforts to be targeted and strategic.
References


