

REACHING THE UNREACHED: BUILDING RESILIENCE WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

*By Jannah Scott, Th.D., Deputy Director, Center for Faith-based & Neighborhood Partnerships,
US Department of Homeland Security*

*Marcus Coleman, Special Assistant to the Director, Center for Faith-based & Neighborhood
Partnerships, US Department of Homeland Security*

Abstract

The Department of Homeland Security Center for Faith-based & Neighborhood Partnerships (i.e., “DHS Center”) is one of thirteen federal centers whose mandate is to engage faith-based and community groups with governments in the delivery of human services. Established in 2006 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the DHS Center has focused on engaging such groups with federal, state and local emergency managers to improve resilience against all hazards. Working alongside local jurisdictions, over the past five years, the DHS Center developed the Building Resilience with Diverse Communities (BRDC) engagement process to improve relationships with faith-based and community organizations and to “reach unreached” populations in emergency preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. BRDC works to improve community resilience by engaging the “whole community” through its seven-stage process. Emergency managers identify underserved and unengaged faith-based and community groups, build relationships and trust through intentional engagement and assess the groups’ capacity to participate in emergency preparedness and response activities. Based on that assessment, emergency managers can use the BRDC process to build partnerships with and between these groups, provide training/technical assistance to strengthen their skills, integrate them into emergency management plans and exercises and include them in their standard operating procedures manuals and emergency management plans.

The DHS Center used the BRDC process in a 2011 pilot initiative with the DHS Science and Technology Directorate and Miami-Dade County Emergency Management. Since that time, the BRDC process has been successfully implemented in Los Angeles, California; Lakewood, New Jersey, and in varying degrees in other communities. The initiative demonstrates that emergency management can adapt the BRDC process to effectively integrate faith-based and community groups into their plans and processes, leverage existing resources, and by doing so, increase resilience with some of the hardest to reach and unreached populations in their jurisdictions.

Key words: resilience, diverse communities, whole community emergency management, cross-sector relationships, unique assets and vulnerabilities, unreached populations.