

Gaining sponsorship: An effective strategy for reducing organizational resistance to emergency management response and planning

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INTRODUCTION

In the last issue of *Journal of Emergency Management* (March/April 2005), I discussed the social and psychological underpinnings of organizational resistance to emergency-management response and planning (EMRP). In this column, I'll explore an effective technique for combating such resistance—namely, gaining community and organizational sponsorship.

One of the most significant challenges for emergency-management (EM) personnel is integrating EM concepts and services into the nuts and bolts of organizations. Gaining sponsorship within an organization or community reduces resistance while assisting in the integration of EM efforts. I found this to be true based on my own research and on numerous professional consultations and collaborations.¹

Specifically, gaining sponsorship involves:

- understanding the role of culture (organizational and community) in forming alliances;
- conducting an organizational landscape analysis (OLA) to develop an integration strategy; and
- identifying and aligning with key influential leaders in the community or organization.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SPONSORSHIP

Before we can identify sponsors, we need to recognize that organizations and communities are composed of “mini” cultural communities. We are often so immersed in the culture and values of the communities in which we live and work that we are unable to step back and understand how they affect what we do and how we might learn to better work within them.

Fundamentally, all communities are created by people who share a vision and create alliances based on the personal needs and goals arising from that vision. These alliances created a set of dynamics that help found a community. For example, developers build bedroom communities because there is a group of people who subscribe to that particular vision of a neighborhood. Voters create ethnic communities because their vision limits membership to people in their particular ethnic group. Service and product communities build their customer bases by fostering and encouraging brand loyalty based on these visions.

Through shared vision, leadership is created and endorsed by the self-selected community. Leaders are responsible for creating perceived-benefit environments within their communities, which are based on endorsed philosophies. As an example, think about the formal way IBM conducts business as opposed to the informality at Apple or Microsoft. Think of the cultural differences between the Mennonite and San Francisco communities. Each

Table 1. Sample questions to reveal organizational landscapes in business and government

Business		Government	
Area of exploration	Possible questions	Area of exploration	Possible questions
Corporate director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the vision of the business? • What is the mission of the business? • What is the vision of your EMRP unit? • What is your EMRP unit's mission, and how does it tie into the mission of the business? 	Community purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the purpose of the community? • What services does the community want? • What is the community vision? • For what services is the community willing to pay? • What is the vision of your EMRP unit?
Business functional and political structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the purpose of the business? • What services or products does it provide? • What do you contribute to the work the business does? • Who are the key leaders, and how do they contribute to the work of the business? • Who are the allies of the key leaders? What does the alliance do for the business? • Do the leaders and alliances value what you provide? 	Community political structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What form of government does the community have? • What is the current political structure within the community? • What has been the historical political structure within the community? • What alliances exist within the community (people, businesses, other politicians)? • What value do these alliances provide for you and your business?
Formal and informal norms and rules of the culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the business value? • What are your rules about work? How does work get done? • What are the rules and values around information? Is information used as part of the business currency or as a tool to achieve recognition or reward? • What place do you have in the workings of the business and what it does with its information? 	Community norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the norms of the community? • What does the community want the government to involve themselves with? To what degree? • What information does the community want from the government? What don't they want? • What is not talked about in the community? • What does the community fear? • How is your service role perceived by your population? How is it accepted? • What frightens your community?
Needs of leaders and influential people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who leads the business? • What are their needs? • What are their issues? • Who influences the leaders? • Which of the leaders are open to the services and products you have to offer? • Who do you know that could assist in making a connection with select leaders and influential people? 	Platforms of leaders and influential people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is in charge of your community? Who is elected? Who really calls the shots? • What are the needs of the "shot callers"? • Who politically supports your service? • What do the politicians need from you and your service? • What can you provide to the population that would help the politicians? • Who influences formal community decision makers?

**Table 2. Summary chart of a business landscape analysis:
Identifying the needs of leaders and influential people**

Systems	Business structure	Key leaders	Key needs and issues
Work	Marketing		
	Financial		
	Operations		
Support	Communication		
	Information processing		
	Library		
	Quality		
Leadership	Board of directors		
	Executive		
	Management		

example dramatically reflects a distinct culture.

In a functional sense, a community that has been in existence for some time organizes and creates internal systems that support its activities. These systems (work, support, leadership, laws, and services) create societies within the overall structure, each with its own unique set of rules. Specific people are responsible for the leadership, maintenance, growth, and safety of the community. It is from these defined internal systems that EM planning and response teams need to receive their direction. If they try to impose their will on the community, they will be defeated.

CONDUCTING AN ORGANIZATIONAL LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Most organizations and communities develop through basic planning methods set forth by the leadership. In business, the board of directors has a president or CEO, while a community elects its leaders at all levels (e.g., governor, county commissioner, town selectman). Planning goals often manifest themselves through written vision and mission statements; however, the goals and objectives of the community may be expressed through other formal and informal planning methods.

To understand the lay of the land in your organization or community, I recommend conducting an organizational landscape analysis (OLA).² An OLA provides the critical information needed to successfully integrate EMRP into a community or organization and identifies the sponsors who will support it. Like planning goals, OLAs can be conducted formally or

informally. I recommend a formal process so adjustments can be made to accommodate personnel or strategic changes. Formal documentation also provides a baseline for the community and enables it to chart its progress.

Generally speaking, OLAs are comprised of a series of questions that reveal key facts regarding corporate direction and that identify appropriate sponsors for EMRP and other projects (Table 1). Emergency planning personnel should obtain the approval of the organization prior to conducting the analysis because of the initial time and costs involved. (Once the initial analysis is conducted, reviews can take place on a scheduled basis at a fraction of the cost and time.) Tables 2 and 3 provide examples of summary OLA charts specific to business and EM that can be used to compile findings and responses.

**SPONSOR-SUPPORTED EMERGENCY
RESPONSE AND PLANNING**

After collecting and charting OLA responses, the EMRP facilitator can:

- determine the current status of EM planning and response in the community;
- plan a strategy to improve that position;
- identify the sponsor(s) needed to sanction changes and ongoing improvements; and

**Table 3. Summary chart of an EMRP landscape analysis:
Identifying the needs of leaders and influential people**

Systems	Community support structure	Key leaders	Key needs and issues
Foundation of the community			
Community activities			
Political/governmental structure			

- determine the common denominators among leaders.

This information will assist in determining the right strategy and tactics for the existing government or organization.

Once a sponsor is identified, he or she can address any concerns community members have about EMRP and help position the organization for effective and successful emergency planning. If a sponsor was used for conducting the OLA, you should check in periodically regarding the progress of the study. This will help establish a relationship and create an alliance within the organization. Later, the OLA sponsor may be a possible aid in strategy development and implementation. If there is no sponsor, then the EMRP facilitator can either conduct the OLA alone or search the community for an appropriate OLA sponsor; this approach, however, is much more challenging.

SELECTING A SPONSOR

Selecting a sponsor begins by identifying key leaders and people with influence in an organization. Ideal sponsorship includes support for EMRP on many levels and is created by promoting EMRP as a win/win situation—in other words, everyone gets something out of it. In sponsor selection, it is important to understand what it is you have that helps the sponsor personally and professionally. The OLA can be useful in identifying these personal-agenda items more quickly.

Due care must be given to agendas within the community, for personal and communal needs can stand in opposition to each other. When these needs are out of alignment, one side of the relationship makes out better than the other. Ultimately, the imbalance could limit the effectiveness of EMRP and, in the worst case, cause the demise of the program altogether as has been seen in several communities.

CONCLUSION

Conducting a formal OLA ensures a thorough understanding of the landscape of a business or community and, thus, its EM needs. The time and expense associated with this method leads to much higher returns in the long run. The basic steps of gaining community sponsorship—determining the organization’s values and direction, identifying key leaders, selecting a sponsor, and partnering with the sponsor to provide effective EMRP—create a foundation for emergency planning that can be implemented with the least organizational resistance, optimizing effectiveness whatever and whenever the crisis.

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