THE PROBLEM
D e f i n e
G o o d
D i s a s t e r
P l a n n i n g

What is good disaster planning? For most of human history, it would have been necessary to provide an answer based solely on unverified assumptions, anecdotal stories, and/or isolated non-random observations. But after over three decades of systematic social science research on organizational preparation for and managing of disasters, we have a solid base of knowledge that can be used for the purposes of assessing planning. – Quarantelli, E. L. (1988). *Criteria for evaluating disaster planning in an urban setting.*

THE CRITERIA*

1 **Write the Process Not The Plan** Create a planning process that is focused on solving problems rather than writing plans. Plans are still there, but the solutions are the point. Use no filled-out templates or lone planners.

2 **Raise Wicked Problems** Disasters are not day-to-day work. Organizations have to form new relationships fast, will lose autonomy for political reasons, will have to take on new responsibilities, will see boundaries blur between the public & private sectors, will have coordination/decision-making/information difficulties, and will be held to new and unexpected performance standards.

3 **Capabilities Not Analogies** Focus on creating one all-hazards approach to disasters. Specific hazards can be addressed, especially when there are technical issues, but the approach is most important.

4 **Coordinate Don't Command** Centralized authority is too slow; adaptability is paramount. Social infrastructures (e.g., face to face huddles) are more important than technology. ICS must be familiar or align with day-to-day structures, can't be militaristic, and shouldn't focus just on the current operational period at the expense of a cohesive strategy.

5 **Strategize To Improvise** Agree on general strategies and empower leaders to improvise tactics. Coordinate through rapid feedback rather than a detailed plan. Hierarchies will naturally flatten; people at all levels will innovate. Leaders should ask questions, make requests, delegate, empower and decentralize around a common mission or be overwhelmed with unimportant detail.

6 **Write Reality** Include what you expect to happen based on your process rather than what you'd like to see. Feuds won't go away; people won't change; your community structures will remain intact.

7 **Be One Community** Plan with public, private and NGO stakeholders across your community. There should be one response system with one coordinating organization, not separate planning by specific groups (even public health). Planning must reflect a community's values and social order or be rejected during an incident.

8 **Slow the Burn** Design plans that discourage knee-jerk reactions that give people time to get valid information and that value creative responses to immense challenges.

9 **No Myths** Planners are "bridge figures" who must translate hard research for practical use.

10 **Think Management** Measure planning against what will help manage the response, or it's worthless. A successful disaster response will:

    A   Tell the difference between scenario-based and all-hazards needs,

    B   Do generic functions well (e.g., things that show up in every response like notification, evacuation)

    C   Effectively mobilize personnel and resources,

    D   Clearly delegate tasks, whether common tasks or tasks unique to the response.

    E   Process a flood of information,

    F   Permit good decision-making by decreasing burnout and solving who owns what,

    G   Build coordination through advocating cooperation toward the greater good,

    H   Engage with citizens who create their own solutions,

    I   Get the best information to the public through all methods and

    J   Have a well-functioning community EOC staffed by knowledgeable decision-makers.

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