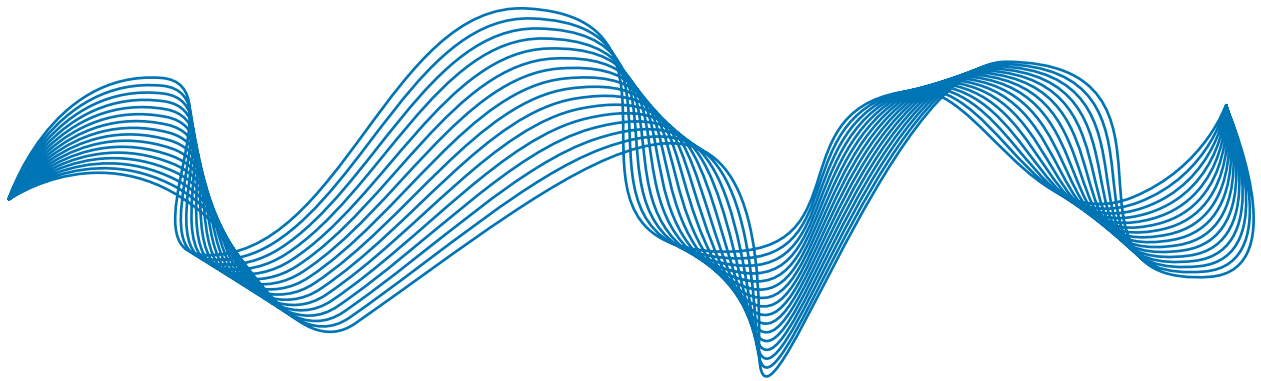


Investigating the extent to which NGOs and governmental agencies are providing equitable support to marginalized groups through a hazard



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Background

Federal agencies have noted the increase in hazards related to climate change, particularly wildfires, hurricanes, and flooding.¹ Recent research shows that continual and repeated disruption caused by hazards disproportionately harms marginalized communities. In early 2023, a research team from the Coastal Resilience Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill administered surveys to personnel from non-governmental and governmental organizations to assess how marginalized groups are being supported through hazardous events. The purpose of the study was to hear from individuals nationwide about the extent to which their organizations receive support and provide equitable support to marginalized groups through a hazard; to learn how they build relationships and trust between their organizations and community members and governmental organizations; and to investigate the types of barriers that prevent disaster recovery.



All images in this policy brief illustrate recent hazards in eastern North Carolina.

Methods

This study is in its third year of application. In the first year, the team constructed a literature review documenting the barriers marginalized communities faced in receiving support from federal agencies following an event. In the second year, the team deployed a participatory action research (PAR) design that centered the voices of respondents who support marginalized populations subjected to hazards. The PAR approach enabled participants to re-evaluate terms (e.g., “solutions”) and provided a space for respondents to name instances of injustice around hazards and link them to oppression and racism. The research team facilitated nine focus groups with three advisory groups and then generated an online survey that was distributed to 179 non-governmental agencies (NGOs) and 140 governmental agencies nationwide. In the third year, the team continued using the PAR framework, validated the survey, and administered the tool to 5,174 purposefully random sampled organizations nationwide. The remainder of this policy brief highlights findings from the third year only.

¹ FEMA. (2021, February 24). Climate change. Retrieved from: <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/climate-change>

Data Collection

Survey

- February – March 2023
- 238 responses from NGO members and local government officials
- Representation from 50 states and 10 FEMA regions

Snapshot of Findings

- Most organizations (62.4 percent) reported that when providing support, they did not target nor prioritize aid for specific racial or ethnic groups experiencing the greatest needs through an event.
- Almost half of respondents (42 percent) agreed that some community members are more marginalized than others and that their organization is committed to supporting such groups (42.9 percent).
- Respondents with self-reported strong relationships with the community identified the people they served as “partners,” “allies,” and “family.”
- Over a quarter of respondents (27.3 percent) agreed that the pandemic made it more challenging to serve marginalized groups, partly due to a reduction in volunteerism.



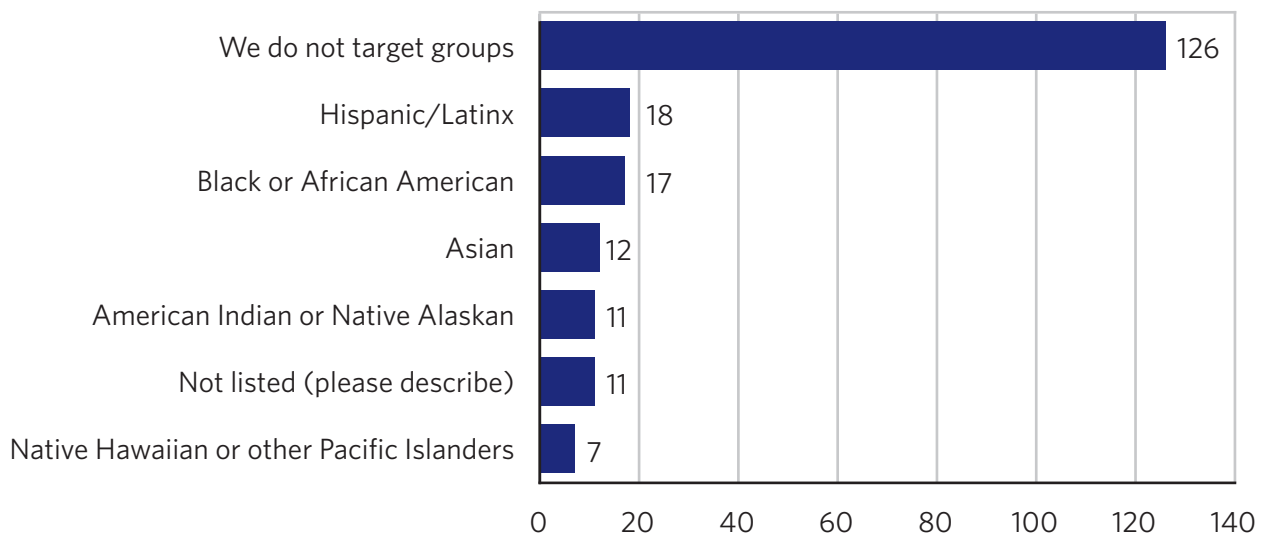
Findings

In our analysis, we found that although nearly half of respondents recognize that marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by a hazard event, most do not tailor their supports to those with the greatest needs. Specifically, we found the following:

- 42.9 percent of respondents indicated that their organizations were committed to addressing the inequities that are experienced by marginalized groups.
- 62.4 percent do not serve specific racial or ethnic groups but aim to support the entire population.
- Some respondents did articulate prioritizing support to specified groups. The following comment from a survey respondent addresses the support of marginalized groups, specifically with mental health concerns: “We would like more people to know that we are available before, during, and after a disaster to provide mental health service in the form of compassionate listening and teaching others how to be compassionate listeners.”

Figure 1. Serving specific racial or ethnic groups.

Does your group intentionally aim to serve specific racial or ethnic groups?



Note: For Figure 1, the number of survey respondents does not equal 238 because not all respondents answered this question. Similarly, for Figures 2–4, percentages do not total 100 because not all survey respondents answered every question.

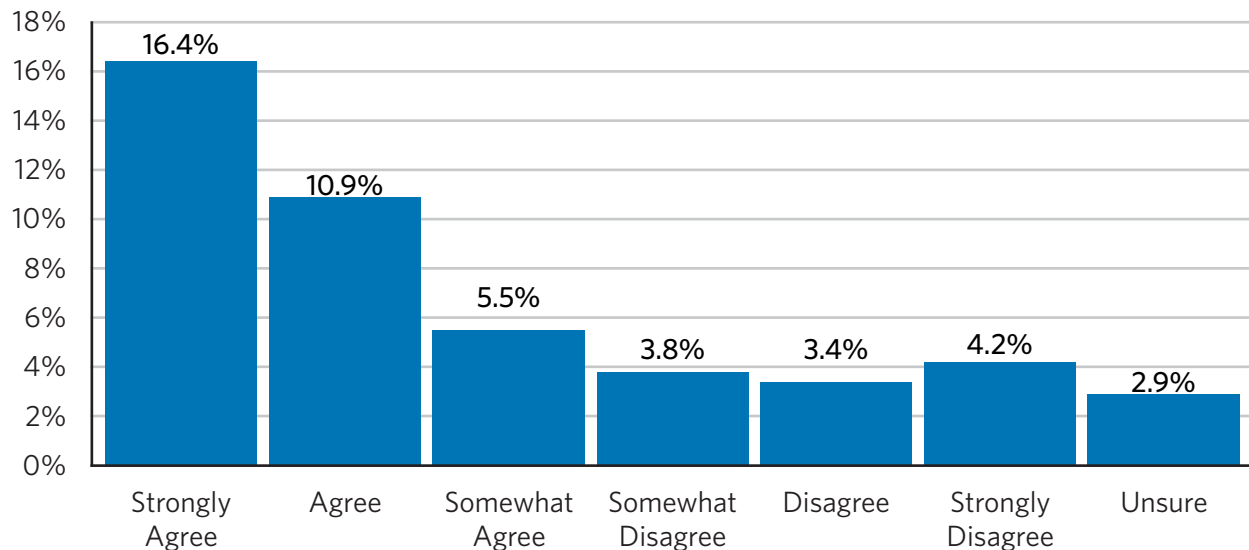
Marginalized groups faced disproportionate access to support and impacts from hazards

While a majority of respondents worked in organizations that did not purposefully target marginalized groups, some noted that these groups were impacted differently from their more privileged peers. Specifically, we found the following:

- 32.8 percent of respondents agreed that certain groups of people, because of their identity, do not have access to the resources they need.
- 42 percent agreed that there are certain groups of people in their community more likely than others to be negatively impacted by hazards.
- One respondent commented, “The marginalized community is always in survival mode prior to disasters. Disasters exacerbate their current conditions.”

Figure 2. Disproportionate access to resources due to identity.

There are certain groups of people who, because of their identity, do not have access to the resources they need.



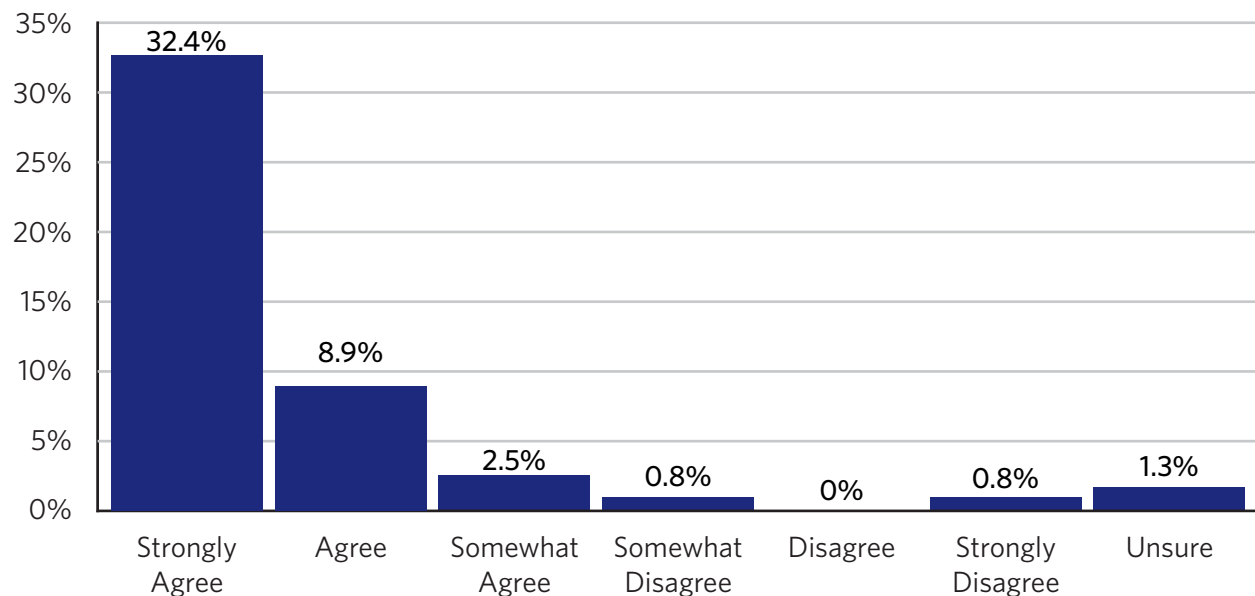
Building and maintaining relationships with the community is vital

Roughly half of respondents agreed that building strong relationships that fostered trust was necessary to meet the needs of their community. Specifically, we found the following:

- 43.8 percent of respondents agreed that their organization works to build trust within the communities that they serve.
- Respondents described their relationships with the communities they serve as “alliances,” “family,” “integral part,” and “partners.” Additionally, respondents noted efforts to create an atmosphere that was “inclusive” and “empowers one another.”
- One respondent commented, “We are very close to the communities we serve; we participate regularly in community meetings and events [and] have stakeholder groups we work with to receive input and advocate together. We believe that we are here for the community’s needs.”

Figure 3. Building trust within the community.

My organization works to build trust within the communities that we serve.



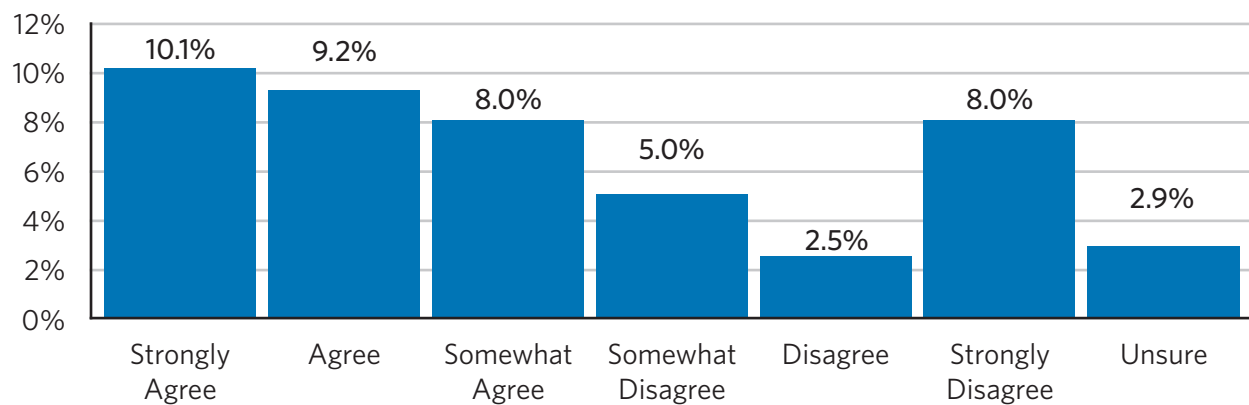
Respondents reported difficulties in meeting communal needs

Roughly one third of respondents reported difficulty in supporting marginalized groups through a hazard. These difficulties were largely due to a lack of staffing, a decline in volunteerism, and limited clarity on the accessibility of federal resources. Specifically, we found the following:

- 34 percent of respondents reported some sort of staffing shortage due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 27.3 percent agreed that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their organizations' ability to serve marginalized communities.
- 29 percent noted that declines in volunteerism hurt their organization.
- Several organizations noted that, although they are aware of resources such as FEMA grants (e.g., the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities initiative), they do not have the capacity or internal resources to apply for them.
- One respondent commented, "Funding for operational support to continue programs is a huge need. We are a small non-profit that doesn't have the capacity to continue serving the community without continued funding for staff and operational support. We rely heavily on volunteers [but] that base has decreased since COVID."

Figure 4. The impact of the pandemic on serving marginalized communities.

The pandemic has had a negative impact on my organization's ability to serve marginalized communities.



Policy Recommendations

In this work, we build upon the power and possibility of collaborative, participatory work. Participatory research enables careful re-evaluation and definition of terms such as “solutions.” We found, in concert with informants, that coming together to speak about how marginalized communities are impacted by hazards enabled us to understand these experiences as practices marked by race and racism. We propose that, in participatory work, the act of naming is a critical part of solution-making and imagining. We have listed below proposed solutions jointly developed by community members and local government officials.

1 Provide intentional, targeted support to marginalized groups.

These groups may be based on race, social class, language, or age, among other identifiers. Most respondents agreed that their organizations did not provide targeted care for specific groups that have suffered the most historically and contemporaneously; however, individuals also stated that their organizations were committed to addressing inequity for marginalized groups. To tackle issues of inequity, organizations must seek to provide targeted support that accounts for differences in supports, opportunities, and privileges.

2 Provide funding to support NGOs working with marginalized groups.

Organizations continue to feel hampered by impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some mentioned a reduction in staffing, while others indicated a significant drop in volunteerism—both of which have made it difficult to provide vital support to marginalized groups through a hazardous event. Respondents from NGOs indicated being aware of various federal funding programs but did not have the capacity or internal resources to apply to them. NGO personnel recommended a more direct and simplified method for organizations to request financial support. Such methods could include open dialogues with federal agencies about support, access to a database with clear and concise calls to funding opportunities, and making the language in applications more user-friendly and accessible.

3 Build trust through encouraging co-creation.

Our findings indicate that NGOs need improved messaging and trust building from governmental agencies. To build trust, service providers should cultivate a cultural understanding of the community, be transparent and accountable, and stay consistently involved in working with community members. Emphasis should be placed on co-creation of programs and plans that account for the lived experiences and perspectives of marginalized people.

We wish to thank the advisory group and survey respondents for providing their time and insight to inform the contents of this report. See the Coastal Resilience Center website (<http://coastalresiliencecenter.unc.edu>) for the full report.

For more information about this study, contact Cassandra R. Davis at cnrichar@email.unc.edu.

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