

Building a trauma-informed care approach

Trauma-informed care is critical to supporting survivors effectively during disaster recovery.

Early in project development, the team learned that disaster recovery staff across agencies are committed to improving their skills in working with survivors. The team co-created three training modules focused on the basics of trauma-informed care; working with survivors; and taking care of oneself when recovering from a disaster. The team piloted in-person training modules in FEMA Region 2, created prototypes of three videos, and produced an accompanying guidebook.

In a site visit to a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) in Vermont, the team learned first-hand from survivors about their challenges in obtaining Federal assistance. Survivors communicated that engaging with DRC staff helps overcome obstacles in the process. The team discovered that DRC staff are not trained in trauma-informed care or working with survivors, however. Federal staff also struggle to cope with the primary and secondary traumatic stress that may result from doing this work. The team believes that improvements in agencies' work with disaster survivors will require agencies and front-line staff to integrate trauma-informed care principles and skills into their practices.

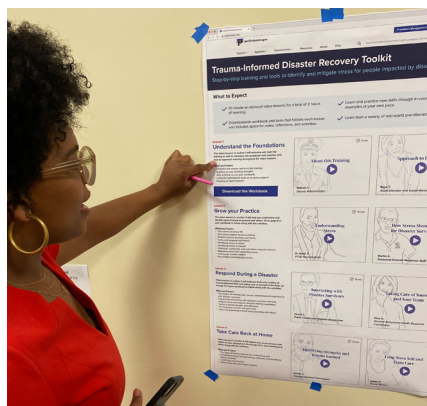
Collaborating agencies:

DHS (FEMA), HHS (SAMHSA), HUD, SBA

Foundation:

Discovery Research & Life Experience Charter

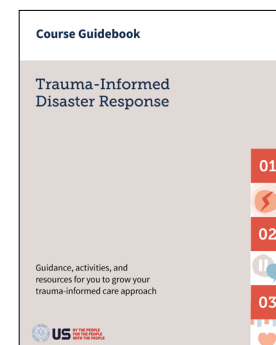
- 91%** of FEMA Region 2 participants were satisfied with the training.
- 89%** of FEMA Region 2 participants indicated that they had a better understanding of trauma-informed care after the training.
- 97%** of FEMA Region 2 participants reported that they are somewhat or very likely to implement at least four of the six principles in their daily work.



Co-design workshop with Federal staff to develop form and content for the training modules.



3 video lessons



Supplemental guidebook

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DESIGN PHASE MILESTONES

Milestone	Status	Notes
Assessed tools and resources—including peer-to-peer approaches—that currently support trauma-informed knowledge-building and identify gaps the project can fill.	✓	Completed. The project team has engaged in several conversations with staff about gaps to fill and conducted a workshop with staff across the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Small Business Administration (SBA), and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to learn about resources they currently use, challenges they face when engaging with and communicating to disaster survivors, and their preferred ways of learning new skills and information.
Hosted Whole Community Advisory Sessions with disaster recovery stakeholders, including people with lived experience in surviving a disaster; these sessions will engage a diverse community about the project and surface their perspectives and buy-in.	✓	Completed. The project team learned from subject matter experts on disaster recovery and trauma-informed care and facilitated two workshops with FEMA, SBA, and HUD staff. The team learned from disaster survivors and conducted prototyping and testing with them.
Built and prototyped draft Federal Disaster Design Guidelines and other trauma-informed tools with users to gauge their applicability and make changes according to user insights.	✓	Completed. Co-created, with and for Federal disaster response staff, an interactive learning journey to build the knowledge and strengthen the skills of Federal disaster recovery staff. Three modules that include in-person training, videos, and an interactive guide book focus on three areas: Understanding trauma and its impact; Recognizing trauma and responding sensitively; and Taking care of yourself and your team. Assessment results identify the need for in-person training and ongoing, sustained efforts in order to successfully change the way in which we engage survivors.

DESIGN PHASE PROJECT MEASURES

Design Phase Measure	Assessment Approach & Data	December 2023 Status
Increased numbers of participating agencies that agree to continue to adapt, and plan to adopt training and design guidelines.	Tabulation and narrative documentation of the process that agencies are using to implement trauma-informed care.	FEMA is piloting this approach in Region 2 in 2023.
NEW: Federal recovery staff are better informed about interacting with survivors with a trauma-informed lens.	Use Kirkpatrick model for evaluation of training (reaction, learning, behavior, results).	The team is measuring the first three levels of the model. In Region 2, 91 percent of the participants were very satisfied with the training. There was dissatisfaction with the virtual component of the training, with participants preferring to have this kind of content done in-person. 89 percent of participants indicated that they had a better understanding of trauma-informed care after the training, and 97 percent reported that they are somewhat or very likely to implement at least four of the six principles in their daily work. Region 2 FEMA's Individual Assistance (IA) team identified 18 "micro-projects" to further implementation. In addition, a welcome committee has been established to provide peer support to new employees (61 percent of new hires have received welcome guides thus far) and a guide to assist staff during their disaster deployment experience is being developed.
Feedback from disaster survivors, including small business owners, on the degree that they feel supported and respected through their interactions with Federal agencies implementing design guidelines for in-person, online, and in written touchpoints.	Qualitative interviews with survivors through Disaster Recovery Centers.	Too early to assess.
Improved experience measures such as trust and satisfaction in sample populations compared to the baseline in real-world tests of revised communications using the design guidelines.	Qualitative interviews and focus groups.	Too early to assess.

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Project Summary

The project will develop standardized design guidelines to promote trauma-informed communications and interactions between agencies and disaster survivors. The work will start with collecting and assessing current communication resources, tools, and resources. The design work will involve prototyping and testing new templates and methods that promote a trauma-informed approach.

Customer pain point:

The project responds to how disaster survivors engage with multiple Federal agencies throughout their disaster recovery journey, without a consistent style, tone, approach, or adequate levels of trauma-informed care. For many, the confusing and complicated process can result in re-traumatization.

Project Objectives

The project will help agency and front-line staff have the knowledge, skills, and support to take a trauma-informed approach when engaging disaster survivors. Ultimately, it will result in a more sensitive and responsive recovery experience for people impacted by disasters.

Target milestones in 2023 include:

- Host Whole Community Advisory Sessions with disaster recovery stakeholders, including people with lived experience in surviving a disaster; these sessions will engage a diverse community about the project and surface their perspectives and buy-in
- Assess tools and resources – including peer-to-peer approaches – that currently support trauma-informed knowledge-building and identify gaps the project can fill

- Build and prototype draft Federal Disaster Design Guidelines and other trauma-informed tools with users to gauge their applicability and make changes according to user insights

Primary deliverables in 2023 include:

- Interim Federal Disaster Trauma-Informed Communication Design Guidelines, including baseline template for integrated disaster overview on available assistance
- First iteration of a tool to support staff capacity and training efforts

Measures of Success

Key outcomes:

The trauma-informed care project will result in increased survivor comprehension and level of engagement with assistance programs.

Design phase project measures:

- Increased numbers of participating agencies that agree to continue to adapt, and plan to adopt, design guidelines
- Feedback from disaster survivors, including small business owners, on the degree that they feel supported and respected through their interactions with Federal agencies implementing design guidelines for in-person, online, and in written touchpoints
- Improved experience measures such as trust and satisfaction in sample populations compared to the baseline in real-world tests of revised communications using the design guidelines