Social Vulnerability Tools Project (SVT)

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The SVT project is funded by RDPO and managed by Metro, and is intended to identify which communities in the region experience barriers to emergency services and programs before, during, and after disasters. People of different ethnicities, abilities, income levels, immigration statuses, English proficiency, tenure (owner, renter, houseless), geography, etc., may face barriers due to institutionalized systems of oppression when trying to access emergency services.

Commonly used federal data is limited and often fails to represent the needs of communities who are most vulnerable to disasters and emergencies. The SVT project aims to augment these sources with local data in order to support the needs of vulnerable populations. The project will also help eliminate barriers to diverse populations accessing emergency services before, during and after disasters. The RDPO (https://rdpo.net/) will use this data to better tailor their programs and investments to serve community needs and improve equity outcomes.

In coordination with advisory groups, the SVT project will define social vulnerability, conduct a literature review and data gap analysis, engage focus groups, identify final datasets, develop regional and county-specific indices, develop methods to update indices, create a report, and train regional emergency management and GIS professionals to use SVT data and maps.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

Equity is at the heart of the SVT project. Emergency management partners recognize people are impacted differently by disasters. Moreover, how we measure social vulnerability varies across jurisdictions. Through community engagement, the project will include communities traditionally underserved by emergency management programs to answer questions related to social vulnerability (regionally and locally), barriers to emergency services, usefulness of demographic data, and gaps in existing data.

GOAL

The goal is to develop tools that identify social vulnerability across the region as well as tools for each of the five counties in the Portland metropolitan region. Social vulnerability tools are a regional asset that can be applied to all hazards during all phases of the disaster cycle. Tools will include a regional definition of social vulnerability, regional and county-specific GIS

data and indices, as well as regional and county-specific maps. Additionally, Metro will provide an SVT report and training for partner agencies.

ADVISORY GROUPS

Metro has formed an Equity Advisory Group to help define social vulnerability, evaluate input variables, identify gaps in data, and discuss index development methods. Metro has begun engaging representatives from five community-based organizations (CBOs), including Native American Youth and Family Center, Coalition of Communities of Color, Centro Cultural, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, Todos Juntos, Real Choice Initiative, and Council for the Homeless. Metro is in the process of expanding the cadre of CBOs engaged from sectors and parts of the region to ensure a wider cross-section of voices and perspectives on disaster vulnerability.

Metro is currently recruiting a Technical Advisory Group comprised of emergency management and GIS professionals in the region. Upon completion, the Technical Advisory Group will meet monthly, occasionally in tandem with the Equity Advisory Group.

PROJECT STATUS (As of September 2021)

Current work on the SVT project includes:
- Finalization of datasets for inclusion in the regional and county-specific social vulnerability indices, with a focus on increasing the categorical or spatial detail provided in the Census.
- Coordination with local partners to identify available human or health services data, along with methods of aggregation to insure privacy protections.
- Development of indices, testing several approaches including inductive and deductive methods (e.g., Susan Cutter's SoVI and CDC's SVI respectively).

Past work on the SVT project includes:
- Literature review of social vulnerability definitions and indices.
- Compilation of variables used in existing demographic or vulnerability indices.
- Evaluation of definitions and variables with community and technical advisory groups.
- Research related to dasymetric GIS methods incorporated into demographic index development, which aims to disaggregate larger Census geographies using ancillary data.
- Successful application for funding for recruitment of additional representatives from community-based organizations to serve on the community advisory group in order to increase subject-area and geographic representation.
- Successful application for additional funding in order to package SVT outputs into a multi-variable exploratory online visualization tool.

TIMELINE OF REMAINING WORK

Major Activities/Milestones	Expected Date of Completion
Draft indices	November 2021
Finalize data	January 2022
Finalize indices	February 2022
Online tool	February 2022
Report	March 2022
Partner trainings	April 2022

PROJECT QUESTIONS

Questions? Want to get involved? Contact Joe Gordon: Joe.Gordon@oregonmetro.gov

Learn more about the RDPO mission and projects at https://rdpo.net/