



KEY ACTION AREA:

Empower community-led disaster preparedness

The need

Extreme heat and wildfires—which contribute to smoke events—are growing more frequent and severe in the Puget Sound.²⁶ Community members are often the first and most trusted responders when disasters strike. However, many communities—particularly low-income, immigrant, rural, and Tribal communities—lack access to clear and language accessible emergency information, cooling and cleaner-air resources, and coordinated support networks.²⁷ Empowering community-led disaster preparedness not only saves lives during emergencies, but also strengthens social connections, builds trust in response systems, alleviates strain on public emergency response services, and ensures that resilience strategies reflect the lived experience of those most at risk. By investing in the capabilities, leadership, and communication networks already present within communities—as well as identifying opportunities for cross-sector solutions not yet mobilized—the region can achieve more equitable, efficient, and culturally-responsive disaster response that reduces harm and accelerates recovery.

Action plans for high-priority strategies

The following action plans outline steps to implement selected high-priority strategies and identify key partners and existing efforts to build on.



Street Market in Seattle, Washington



This is an excerpt from the C2ES Regional Action Roadmap for Extreme Heat and Wildfire Smoke, informed from conversations from the South-Central Puget Sound Climate Resilient Communities Accelerator.

Find the full Roadmap here: <https://www.c2es.org/document/puget-sound-action-roadmap>.



HIGH-PRIORITY STRATEGY: Build and activate a regional, cross-sector trusted partner network for locally led disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

Communities and businesses increasingly rely on trusted local resource providers—both formal and informal—during disasters. This action plan aims to align and coordinate a regional, cross-sector network that can be activated during heat and smoke events to provide disaster support, guidance, and information, while building local capacity across communities and businesses to respond to these hazard events.

STEPS:

1. **Engage neighborhood and business** networks to identify the existing disaster management landscape, including community-specific needs, assets (including funding, tools, data, and local knowledge), and practices.
2. **Map trusted community partners** by identifying community-based organizations, nonprofits, cultural groups, local businesses, and informal community leaders who already serve as trusted messengers and points of support during emergencies. To maintain the safety of trusted community partners, develop a data management plan for how information on trusted partners will be collected, stored, and used.
3. **Conduct a strengths-and-needs survey** with these trusted partners to uncover existing skills, language assets, and outreach channels—while pinpointing resource and capacity gaps that limit disaster readiness.
 - Inventory public resources available, such as emergency and safety training programs offered by localities and counties.
 - Mobilize private-sector support by convening business leaders to identify partners who can help fill resource and capacity gaps.
4. **Establish a regional community resilience network charter** by codeveloping a clear structure outlining roles, communication pathways, activation triggers, shared responsibilities, and existing regional resource hubs to ensure coordinated and equitable response during heat and smoke events.
5. **Expand emergency training for community members** by partnering with the public health sector, healthcare providers, and emergency management agencies to train the trusted partners in preparedness and response functions—building on models like *Seattle's Community Safety Ambassadors program*.²⁸

ESSENTIAL LEADERS AND PARTNERS:

- **Nonprofit:** community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, chambers of commerce, business associations, community foundations
- **Public:** emergency management departments and agencies, public health organizations, public health departments at the local and state levels
- **Private:** local businesses and business networks, health insurance providers, hospitals, and health clinics

EXAMPLES AND EXISTING EFFORTS:

- Maricopa Association of Government's *Heat Relief Network*²⁹
- City of Seattle's *Community Safety Ambassadors Program*³⁰
- City of Seattle's *Seattle Neighborhoods Actively Prepare (SNAP)*³¹
- *Washington (and Local) 211*³²
- British Columbia's *Provincial Heat Alert and Response System (BC HARS)*³³
- *Larimer Connects*³⁴
- *East Maui Ready*³⁵



HIGH-PRIORITY STRATEGY: Improve equitable access to regional disaster information through community-driven outreach and engagement.

Delivering accurate, timely, and actionable information to residents and businesses is essential during disasters, such as extreme heat and smoke events. This action plan aims to design more effective and equitable disaster information and communications informed by the experiences and perspectives of local communities and businesses.

STEPS:

- 1. Assess communication networks and gaps** by mapping existing emergency communications channels across public agencies, utilities, schools, media, workplaces, and community organizations to identify where messaging does not reach frontline communities.
- 2. Elevate existing models** by identifying culturally inclusive, community-led, and sector-specific emergency and disaster communication materials for both communities and businesses and using them as templates for regional expansion.
- 3. Codesign culturally resonant and sector-specific messaging with trusted partners** by working with community-based organizations and local businesses to host creative workshops—such as through participatory methods³⁶—that generate trusted, accessible communication formats, including visual, storytelling-based, multilingual, non-digital, and culturally specific approaches.
- 4. Test and refine communication concepts** with community members and business leaders to assess clarity, trust, and accessibility, and refine messaging based on real-world feedback and comprehension.
- 5. Create a regional disaster communication playbook** for developing accessible, inclusive, and culturally tailored messaging resources, including:
 - pre-disaster preparedness checklists and outreach tools
 - during-disaster rapid alert and safe-space communication templates
 - post-disaster recovery and resource navigation guidance.
- 6. Activate grassroots distribution networks** by equipping trusted messengers (e.g., community leaders, school staff, health workers, local businesses, or the *Trusted Partner Network established under the high-priority strategy described on page 20*) with tools to expand the reach of communication materials—particularly in areas identified as having gaps in Step 1. These tools could include:
 - the regional disaster communication playbook developed through step five
 - ready-to-use communication kits informed by findings from step four.

ESSENTIAL LEADERS AND PARTNERS:

- **Nonprofit:** community-based organizations, community foundations
- **Public:** public-information officers, academic institutions (particularly those focused on art and communications)
- **Private:** communications experts and firms, academic institutions (particularly those focused on art and communications), businesses

EXAMPLES AND EXISTING EFFORTS

- King County's *Inclusive Emergency Communications Plan and Trusted Partner Network*³⁷
- Seattle-King County Public Health's *Hot Weather Preparedness Comics and Brochures*³⁸
- *Juneau Street Pod*³⁹
- *Seattle Emergency Hubs*⁴⁰