

Homeland Security Strategic Planning for Urban Areas

Urban areas pose a myriad of challenges and vulnerabilities regarding threats posed by acts of terrorism. Population and building density, dependence on critical infrastructure, integrating multiple disciplines, coordinating varying levels of government, and facilitating the appropriate expenditure of dollars are all issues on the front burner of today's urban homeland security planners. In the United States, extra funds are being directed specifically to urban areas to supplement other funding in the area of homeland security preparedness.

Many highly urbanized areas are not governed by a single entity, but contain a mixture of city, county, special district, regional, state, federal, and other governing entities. Into this layering of governments comes well-intentioned funding designed to enhance the capabilities of all entities to prepare for and mitigate against acts of terrorism. The key questions are: where should the money go and what expenditures should have priority?

Through its work in the metropolitan areas of Seattle, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., ICF Consulting has learned some valuable lessons regarding strategic planning for homeland security. These lessons suggest that a consensus-driven process, which includes and validates stakeholder participation, best positions urban areas to successfully implement strategic plans that will guide future decisions regarding funding, partnering, and prioritizing action items.

Thinking Like an Urban Area

A threshold challenge is to position key stakeholders to act and think like one urban area, in one large discipline called "homeland security." This is a huge hurdle, given that any one entity may have various internal disciplines competing for dollars (eg., police, fire, public health, transportation, public works), and that entity in turn feels it is competing

against other jurisdictions for its "piece of the pie." Several steps can start a process that acknowledges common goals, mission, and vision. Engagement of stakeholders regarding their expectations, needs, and concerns about a strategic process is critical. Development of a commonly held position that reflects stakeholder input can validate the engagement process and create momentum. Equally important is an acceptance that all jurisdictions and disciplines do not need to be equally awarded. Stated another way by one stakeholder, "the process must be transparent, but not necessarily equitable."

Leveraging Assets and Best Practices

Areas that have been impacted by terrorist attacks and other disasters quickly learn that "we are all in this together." Mutual aid agreements, inventories of assets, public-private partnerships, and the benefits of joint exercises and training activities all accelerate the ability of a large urban area to effectively respond and recover. A comprehensive strategic planning process regarding homeland security will acknowledge the totality of assets and skills that benefit the entire urban area. This allows a subsequent determination of gaps, "weak links" in the intra-urban partnership, and identification of leadership entities that can mentor the remainder of the urban area.

Getting "Buy-In" from Decision Makers

A strategic planning process must have the endorsement of key decision makers from the moment it commences. It must acknowledge limits based on legal issues, past history, current relationships, and likelihood of success. The process



Perspectives™

itself must strive to preserve this endorsement, as any sense of “winners and losers” will cause that endorsement to evaporate. The strategic planning process at its best produces an advisory document that will be used as a basis for decision making, or as a basis for opposition to proposed actions. The strategic plan itself is rarely legally binding; however, it should contain explicit tasks, assigned lead coordinators, expected outcomes, and timelines. Finally, the plan should contain a “re-visitation clause” to check the validity and relevance of the plan on a regular basis.

An effective urban area homeland security strategic plan can serve as a unifying agent for key stakeholders, as a resource for decision makers, and as a roadmap for integrating and leveraging best practices throughout the area’s disciplines and jurisdictions.

For more information about ICF Consulting’s capabilities in strategic planning for emergency management and homeland security, please visit www.icfconsulting.com/EMplanning.