Hurricane Maria Project

Information Providers Interview Guide for:

Mayors & Mayoral Office Representatives

OMB Control #0693-0078
Expiration Date: 07-31-2022

Script for Introduction:

"Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. We are interested in your perspective on information and communications related to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017. We would like to better understand this hurricane because it impacted a non-continental and Spanish-speaking U.S. island. Ideally, these interviews will lead to beneficial recommendations to policy, procedures, and codes. We realize that the hurricane was a few years ago, and some details may not readily come to mind. We will try to walk you through different topics and events to aid your memory, but let us know if you need any clarifications. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions, we just want to understand your perspectives and experience. Your responses will never be linked to your individual identity, instead, findings will be attributed to a "Hurricane Information Provider" at the national, commonwealth, regional, or local level, and will only be shared in aggregate detail. Are you ready to begin?"

Required Script for Paperwork Reduction Act:

"A Federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, nor shall a person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with an information collection subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 unless the information collection has a currently valid OMB Control Number. The approved OMB Control Number for this information collection is 0693-0078. Without this approval, we could not conduct this information collection. Public reporting for this information collection is estimated to be approximately 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the information collection. All responses to this information collection are voluntary. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this information collection, including suggestions for reducing this burden to the National Institute of Standards and Technology at: Katherine Johnson, Social Scientist and National Construction Safety Team Member, NIST Engineering Laboratory; or contact at katherine.johnson@nist.gov."

Section A: Background Question

1. Please describe to us the position you held in the days prior to Hurricane Maria.
    a. How long had you held that position? [List responses for all individuals if there are multiple persons]
2. What were your primary roles and duties in your position with regard to informing or communicating about hurricanes?
3. Who are the groups or individuals you are responsible for communicating too? We will refer to these people in further questions as your "stakeholders".
4. Before Hurricanes Irma and Maria, can you briefly describe any previous experiences you've had with hurricanes?

Section B. Storm Data and Situational Awareness

We would like to discuss where your information about the storm came from.

5. Thinking of the days leading up to Hurricane Maria making landfall on Puerto Rico, could you summarize the information, data, and products you / your office received related to Hurricane Maria related to Puerto Rico?
    a. Were any of these products particularly helpful to your decision process?
6. Were any kind of Decision Support Services delivered to you (e.g. e-mail blast, online multimedia videos, webinar/conference calls) from the National Hurricane Center, WFOs, EM's, the media, or others?
    a. Were they helpful to your decision process?
7. Do you remember over time, if any particular items or threats were emphasized to you /your office? (And by whom?)
8. Do you remember a point at which you thought Hurricane Maria would be different than other storms or significant in any way? What led you to that conclusion?
    a. And, do you remember at what point (if at any) you felt confident enough in forecasts that action should be taken (e.g., evacuation notices)?

Section C. Evacuation and Decision-Making

Next, please describe how you used this information and your knowledge and experience to make evacuation/sheltering decisions before and during Hurricane Maria.

9. Who decided which areas had to evacuate; and how (and when) was this decision was made?
    a. *Follow-up:* How were these decisions made/ by whom?
        i. (And were these policies set in advance?; were they followed?)

b. *Follow-up:* When were these decisions made, and based upon what information (e.g. watches or warnings? Certain information or graphics?)

c. *Follow-up:* What (and/or who) influenced your decisions to instruct the public on specific protective actions (e.g., evacuation or shelter in place)?

Section D. Communication

The next set of questions is about how you communicated information about Hurricane Maria to your stakeholders.

10. Please walk us through you/ your office's communication process leading up to Hurricane Maria making landfall. Specifically, over time how did you communicate information and updates about the storm and evacuations to the public?

   a. Did social media play a role in your communications?

   b. Were both English and Spanish messages sent? What did these messages say?

11. Over time, what were the items, threats, or themes you chose to emphasize most to the public, and how did you do so (i.e. using what products and channels)? What made you decide to emphasize those items or threats at that times?

   a. *Follow-up* (if not mentioned): Specifically, over the course of the hurricane what were items or threats (e.g. flash flooding, landslides, storm surge, high winds) you chose to emphasize most to different stakeholders, and why?

   b. *Follow-up*: What products, language, or channels did you choose to use to communicate these threats or themes? Do you think they did their job?

Section E. Inter-agency Coordination

12. Reflecting back on the hurricane, how well do you think communication and inter-agency coordination (if any) worked between the NHC and different information-providers involved (e.g. WFOs, SERFC, WPC, and OPC, EM's, the media, and the public)?

13. Can you please describe one or two specific examples of communication success between particular organizations, describing what worked well and why?

14. Can you think of one to two examples when communications did not work well, or difficulties that you or coworkers/staff/ or colleagues encountered? Please identify what did not work well (e.g. procedures, systems, personnel, etc.).

   a. What do you think could be done to improve on these problems?

15. In your perspective, how consistent was information related to Hurricane Maria as it was disseminated throughout the weather community (i.e. NHC, WFOs, meteorologists)?

   a. Do any key issues seem important to improve effective communication?

Section F. Evacuation Process

The next set of questions has to do with evacuations.
16. In general, how did the evacuations go? What worked and what didn't work?
    a. *Follow-up* (if no response): What worked well during the evacuations?
    b. *Follow-up* (if no response): Were there any obstacles or unforeseen problems? If so, please describe.
17. Who led or coordinated the evacuation efforts?
    a. *Follow-up*: If not one person or agency, which individuals/agencies were in charge of different efforts?
18. What might have been some of the barriers to evacuation across the island? Or in particular locations?

Section G. Sheltering Process

19. Overall, how did the sheltering process go? What worked and what didn't work?
    a. *Follow-up* (if no response): What worked well related to the shelters?
    b. *Follow-up* (if no response): Were there any obstacles or unforeseen problems? If so, please describe. What could have been done differently, if anything?

Section H. Ending Questions

We're almost finished with the interview. We just have a few last questions.
20. Since Hurricane Maria, were there any new procedures, guidelines, or policy changes that have been developed and/or implemented relating to hurricane products, communication, and/or interagency coordination? Can you describe these changes or share with us any updated products?
21. If you were to go through an experience like Hurricane Maria again, is there anything you would suggest for yourself or others do differently? Can you explain why and how?
    a. Are there any new products, rules, or services that would aid in the changes you would suggest? If so, which ones (and how would they be used)?
22. Before we go, is there anyone else whom you think we should reach out to for an interview on these topics? (e.g., someone influential in communicating hurricane risks, forecasts, etc. to the public)
23. Thank you for your time. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us that we didn't already discuss?