Chapter 4
A Public Sector Practitioner’s Perspective on Public Private Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are something that greatly benefit the public sector and should be encouraged in as many ways as possible. That is, the more participation that can be generated from entities in the public and the private sectors, then the better mitigation, preparedness, and response activities will be. The main concerns are the management of realistic expectations and of all involved entities upholding their promises. This chapter discusses how proper training and transparency of the actions can diminish the risks associated with PPPs. This chapter also discusses how open communication helps maintain realistic expectations, and how maintaining realistic expectations will result in less reliance being placed on any one business or agency. This will lead to more educated people responding faster, which in turn ultimately leads to the original goal of emergency managers (i.e. working yourself out of a job).

INTRODUCTION

Public private partnerships can be seen in many different ways by many different people. The basic definition of a partnership can be stated as “a relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility, as for the achievement of a specified goal.” (Farlex, 2009) In accordance with the name, one party is from the public sector, and one is from the private sector. But does it need to be that simple and as such, restrictive? Can there be more than just two parties involved? Is it only for the time frame of one job? This paper will discuss multiple definitions and examples of public private partnerships as well as give examples of the types of partnerships formed within one agency, namely the Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management within Baltimore City.

Also discussed will be why these partnerships exist, and how they are seen within the public scope. It is the belief of this author that the vast...
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number of potential uses of public private partnerships can only advance Emergency Management. They should be encouraged on all levels provided that the risks and challenges associated with public private partnerships are acknowledged by all participants.

“In emergency management, the ultimate goal is to put yourself out of a job.” This is the opinion of Connor Scott, the Deputy Director of the Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management in Baltimore City. By this, if emergency managers can improve the system, close existing gaps, and educate the people about what to do in the event of an emergency then ultimately an Emergency Manager would no longer be needed. Everyone will know what to do, who to talk to if they need help, and the actual rate of incidents will be reduced drastically due to mitigation and training.

While this is a novel concept, the actual execution seems to be an insurmountable task. Where would one even start? As this chapter is being written in one of the coldest winters on record in Baltimore City, take the example of a water main freezing and bursting. To begin with, an emergency manager must realize that it is not always about what you know but who you know. You know that the water prior to the location in the pipe needs to be stopped. You know that if the temperature is below zero at the area of the line break ice will be forming and the roads will need to be treated so that no further accident occurs. You also know that people or places that receive water from that pipeline might be severely impacted and need to be taken care of (i.e. nursing home, hospital, restaurants, private homes, etc.) as they no longer have water to drink, shower, flush toilets, cook food, provide services among other things. In addition to not having the water output, the now stagnant water left in the pipe could freeze and cause additional problems and added expenses. No one person is in charge of all operations and departments within their jurisdiction. When there is an incident of any type, the emergency manager must know who they need to call in order to get the right kind of help in the shortest time possible. The shortest time possible may require bringing in the private sector to help in public sector activities. They also need to be able to alert the people impacted either through broadcasts from local news channels or by local business groups in the form of public private partnerships. If you did not already know who these people were, it would take lots of time and resources that could be better used handling the actual incident.

CHANGING TO SUSTAIN PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Knowledge, skills and abilities are central to the emergency manager’s “toolbox”. For example, the departments of the city that need to be notified (i.e. Department of Public Works) would already be known to the Emergency manager. However, it is the private sector where efforts need to be focused on creating relationships and a back and forth information flow in order to mitigate incidents as well as reduce the impact of incidents once they occur. But what constitutes a public private partnership? The actual definition is vitally important as everyone needs to be on the same page in terms of expectations, roles and timeframes if they are to be effective. This needs to change if public private partnerships are ever to realize their full potential.

While it is safe to say that the two basic partners need to be a government agency along with a private entity (i.e. business, group, community, etc.) that is where the agreement seems to stop. Some definitions add that it needs to be contractual and serve some public interest. (Boardman, 2012) Others will say that it does not need to be contractual but instead consists of a “clear alignment of interests and visions.” (Burstein & Shikada, 2013) The contract aspect of the definition is instead replaced by a “nontraditional
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