

Addressing Communication for Epidemic Preparedness in Local Communities

In the wake of the 2014 Ebola crisis in West Africa, and the uncertainty over whether the disease could spread to the United States, epidemic preparedness emerged as a pressing challenge for many communities. Moreover, the Ebola crisis and reliance on social media highlighted a specific need for more coordinated communication that balances trust, fear, and accuracy. The purpose of the project was to understand the landscape of epidemic preparedness in our community, to bring relevant stakeholders to co-design effective channels to manage trust, fear, and accurate communication during epidemics in the age of digital communication and share local and promote inter-agency collaboration at local and national levels. Through a SWOT analysis the theme of ‘communication and epidemics’ emerged, leading to a local community stakeholder forum. This forum used system’s approach and the World Cafe Method to allow participants to mind map current and future state. The forum identified how different populations in our community receive public health information. It also highlighted both current best practices used and challenges faced by different stakeholders in our community while communicating epidemic preparedness communication. Lastly, recommendations were co-created by forum participants to address several identified challenges.