

PrepTalks Discussion Guides provide a framework for community leaders to translate insights from the PrepTalk into community planning and outreach. Community leaders can use the PrepTalks materials at meetings, workshops, and conferences to address critical emergency management topics with whole community partners.

## Daniel Homsey – Neighborfest: Building Resilience from the Block Up!

Daniel Homsey is the Director of the Neighborhood Empowerment Network (NEN) for the City Administrator’s Office of the City of San Francisco. The NEN empowers residents to build and steward stronger, more resilient communities. Mr. Homsey has spent the last 25 years as a communications professional in both the private and public sectors.

In his PrepTalk, Daniel Homsey shares his tools for building resilient communities at the neighborhood level and why empowering neighbors to help themselves is the best way to prepare your community for any disaster.

*“One of the most important challenges of our time...is making sure that everybody, every day, has the same opportunity to succeed regardless of the stress or shock that comes their way.*

— Daniel Homsey

## Partners for the Discussion

Building resilience at the neighborhood level is a critical element of a disaster-ready community. We suggest bringing together emergency management partners that work with the community, including Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) representatives, Neighborhood Watch programs, homeowner associations, and community organizations, to watch this PrepTalk and discuss ways to build social cohesion and bring neighborhoods together to prepare for disaster.

## Discussion Topics

### Topic 1: Understanding the Importance of Social Cohesion

Mr. Homsey begins and ends his PrepTalk with personal stories: of his Aunt Dolores, who died in a San Francisco heat wave, and of his father, who was saved by a neighbor during similar circumstances. Through these stories, Mr. Homsey powerfully demonstrates how building social cohesion also builds community resilience—how knowing and trusting your neighbors, and being a good neighbor in return, can prevent tragedies from happening. Simple questions, such as whether your neighborhood has an email distribution



list, whether you can name the last names of ten neighbors, or whether a trusted neighbor has a key to your home, are markers of strong neighborhood ties.

Mr. Homsey cites the work of Dr. Daniel Aldrich, whose research shows that individual personal connections to others in a community is a determining factor for survival, for having residents stay or return to their communities after disaster, and for mental health support. Watch Dr. Aldrich's PrepTalk "[Social Capital in Disaster Mitigation and Recovery](#)" to learn more about his research.

*"It's not just about WHAT's in your kit. It's about WHO's in your kit."*

— Daniel Homsey

### Take Action

- Mr. Homsey shares the example of how social ties can make a difference during periods of extreme heat, especially in communities that do not generally face high temperatures. What are other examples of how strong social ties can help prevent tragedy or make an incident response more effective?
- What are ways you can determine which neighborhoods have strong social cohesion and which are more loosely connected? Are there proxy measures of social cohesion?

### Topic 2: Building Neighborhood Programs

#### *NEN's Empowered Communities Program*

Understanding the value of inclusiveness and social connection led to the creation of San Francisco's [Neighborhood Empowerment Network \(NEN\)](#). The NEN's overarching initiative, called the Empowered Communities Program, builds social capital in neighborhoods by working with community members to create and implement tailored plans to improve resilience. Their approach is rooted in five tenets:

- **Plan with people ... not for them.** Instead of giving the neighborhood a plan, Mr. Homsey explains that by asking questions of community members and including them in the planning process, the neighborhood truly owns and understands the plan.
- **Design with people ... not for them.** Similarly, the initiatives and programs are designed by the community and reflect community interests, concerns, and culture. Working with residents and with the organizations that support them is critical to building effective programs.
- **Be scalable, duplicable, and sustainable.** Build a process that sticks and is self-sustaining to maximize benefit from finite resources.
- **Offer real value for stakeholder organizations, from all sectors and at all levels.** Ensure that community initiatives solve real problems for participating stakeholders.
- **Drive ownership at the neighborhood level by transferring power.** Support the process but transfer the power. Make sure the neighborhood knows they are taking responsibility for their own safety.

**Building Cross-Sector Neighborhood Networks**

Mr. Homsey recommends that the first step in building a hub, or an interconnected neighborhood network is to identify anchor institutions (AIs). AIs are organizations in a neighborhood that are trusted sources for that community—a church, a non-profit, a rec center, a corner store, etc. NEN finds an AI in each neighborhood and partners with them. NEN then connects the AI to other organizations and community leaders active in the area (e.g., pharmacies, libraries, Boy Scout troops) to build a cross-sector network that serves the neighborhood. The goal is to build a network of organizations that come to the table and work as a team to help prepare community residents for times of stress.

The next step is to identify block champions (existing and emerging leaders in neighborhoods at the block level).

San Francisco’s [Block Champion](#) program empowers these embedded leaders and gives them tools to lead preparedness efforts in their neighborhood. Block champions play several critical roles:

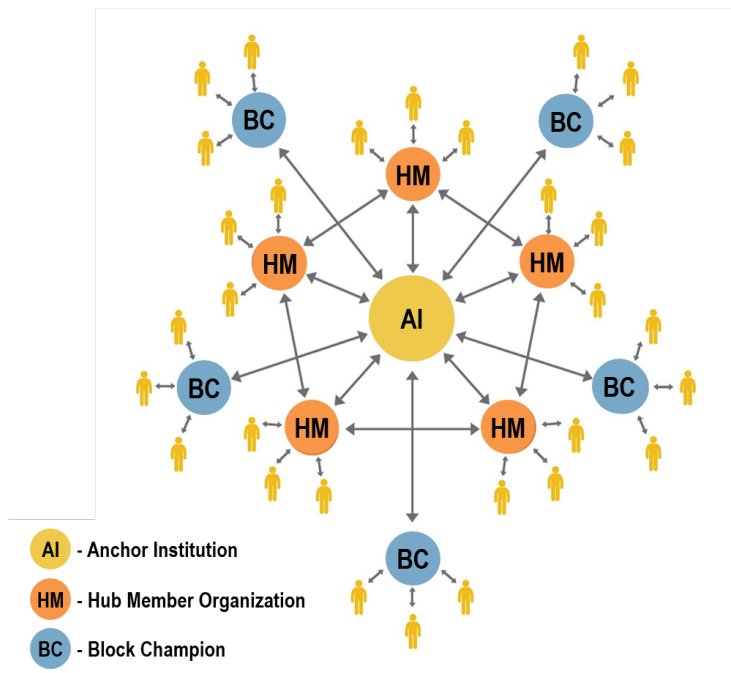
- Establish teams of neighbors willing to help build their community’s resilience.
- Increase readiness in the neighborhood.
- Help ensure people know their neighbors, old and new, and include neighbors with access and functional needs.
- Activate plans in times of stress, mobilize neighbors to provide care and shelter and support each other, and support first responders who may be stretched thin.

The Sonoma County District Four Supervisor, James Gore, explains how block captains helped recover from the 2017 Tubbs Fire in his PrepTalk: “[Forging Resilient Community Through Imperfect Relentless Progress.](#)”

**Take Action**

- What offices in your jurisdiction can lead the effort to build cross-sector networks at the neighborhood level? Who could help identify AIs? What community groups or volunteer organizations should you work with to find hub member organizations?

**HUB Pre-Event**



Source: Daniel Homsey’s PrepTalk Presentation

❑ How could you recruit block champions? Who will serve as their point of contact in the community, in the neighborhood, and in the jurisdiction?

**Topic 3: Neighborhood Action**

The Neighborfest event is the central mechanism that the NEN uses to support block champions in taking action with their neighbors. This event is a block party with a theme of building cohesion throughout the neighborhood and identifying resources.

Neighborfest builds capacity by:

- Introducing neighborhood members to the basic concepts of the Incident Command System through planning the block party.
- Creating local team and increasing social cohesion among neighbors.
- Mapping neighborhood assets, such as resources, skills, and contact information, for use in response activations.
- Creating plans for mass feeding and shelter.
- Communicating in a culturally competent manner.
- Increasing the level of readiness of residents and connection to first responders.

Neighborfest concludes with a tabletop exercise called Map Your Resilientville. Using a satellite photo of the actual neighborhood, residents discuss where they would find mission-critical resources and services if they had no power, water, sewer, electricity, or communications.

*“It's your home, it's your family, it's your block...own it. No one else is going to care more about your family than you.”*  
— Daniel Homsey

*“[Community members] find the resources in their community that are real and tangible things that we would never have known about in a million years down at City Hall.”*  
— Daniel Homsey

NEN's Map your Resilientville Tool

After hosting over 80 Neighborfests throughout San Francisco, NEN has identified clear benefits to participating agencies, including identifying block leaders, conducting culturally competent outreach, establishing higher levels of trust with your agency, achieving significant reductions in staffing and event costs, and gaining quality face-time with hard-to-reach constituents.

### Take Action

- How could you empower neighborhood leaders to build and maintain strong and resilient neighborhoods? How could you replicate the Neighborfest concepts in your community?
- What resources are available in your community to support implementing neighborhood readiness efforts, including CERT members and other community safety volunteers? Could any partners help underwrite the minimal costs needed?

**For the companion Facilitator Slides and Resource List for this PrepTalk, visit:**

<https://www.fema.gov/blog/preptalks-daniel-homsey-neighborfest-building-resilience-block>