

WFO Indianapolis Hosts First Annual Service Equity Team (SET) Conference

The Weather Forecast Office in Indianapolis partnered with Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) to host the first Service Equity Weather Messaging and Community Engagement Conference on August 1st, 2024. This event was organized and conducted by WCM Sam Lashley, Meteorologist Cody Moore and Lapenta Summer Intern Kaily Gomez. Held as a hybrid in-person and virtual one day conference, deep core partners were able to come together and interact with members of numerous community organizations that are a part of, or work with, typically underserved and vulnerable communities. Government representatives in attendance included Emergency managers, IDHS, Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), Indiana Governor's office, multiple NWS WFO offices, and NWS headquarters. Organizations from the community included those representing people with disabilities, deaf and hard of hearing, red cross, schools, diverse cultures, refugees, the Consulate of Mexico regional office, and many other important groups.

Summer intern Kaily Gomez was selected through the Lapenta Internship Program to lead the effort in putting together this initial Service Equity Conference to identify and bring together all relevant partners and organizations. Kaily was able to find 95 organizations across central Indiana that work closely with a variety of underserved communities and conduct operations that may be particularly at-risk during times of hazardous weather. She narrowed down these organizations further to those that had goals that were similarly aligned to those of this conference. Using her background in Sociology and Environmental Equity, Kaily was able to draft up personalized introductory emails to each organization which was followed by a very high response rate. In addition to these community organizations, over 200 core partners were also sent invites.

With Deaf and Hard of Hearing partners attending the event, protocols were followed for requesting in person and virtual ASL interpreters through NOAA OHCS. Two virtual ASL interpreters and one in person interpreter were provided for the entirety of the conference. Indiana state deaf and hard of hearing partners were very grateful for the efforts made to better serve them and look forward to working with the NWS in the future to increase services for their community.

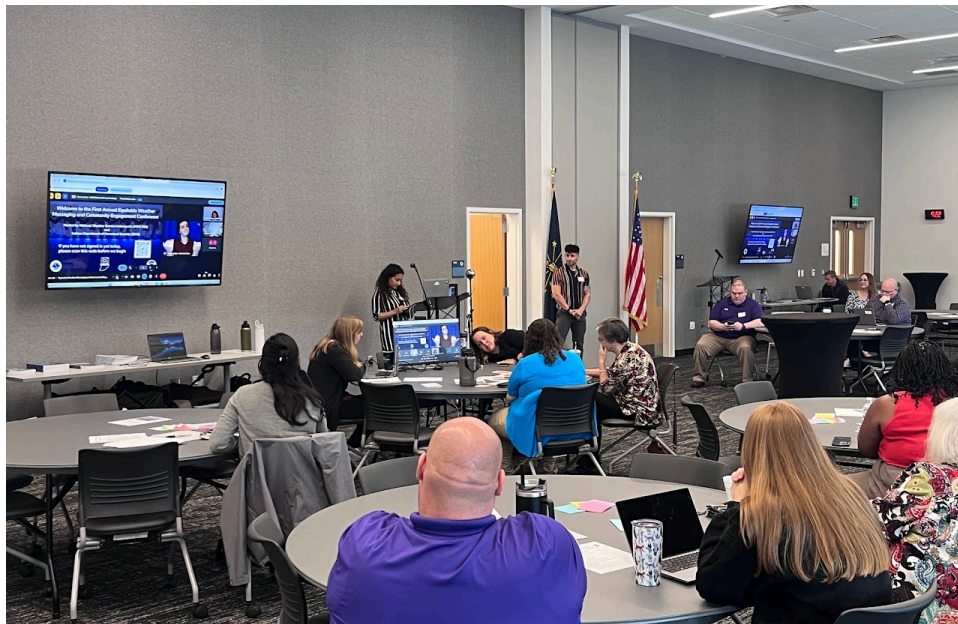
The full day conference began with introductions from WFO Indianapolis, IDHS, and Peter Roohr from the Lapenta Program. Earl Breon, WFO IND Observation Program Lead, then facilitated an ice breaker activity centered around working together and cognitive diversity. After warming up, the room was split into both in person and virtual breakout sessions where groups discussed how weather impacts their agencies/organizations and constituents, safety and preparedness plans, and barriers to receiving and acting upon weather alerts. After a break for lunch, each group presented summaries of what they learned and discussed in their breakout sessions. Afterwards, the NWS, IDHS, FEMA, and the Red Cross all gave speeches and presentations over various products and services they offer and how they work towards serving underserved communities. The last session of the day consisted of a Q&A panel discussion with NWS staff, IDHS, and FEMA. Attendees were asked to submit questions for the panel ahead of

time and also write down any questions they may have throughout the day. This was quite the informative session lasting over an hour leading to great discussions to end the conference. Overall, there were around 90 attendees for the conference, with about half utilizing the virtual option throughout the day.

Feedback so far has been incredibly positive with overwhelming support to conduct this conference annually. Moving forward, these annual meetings between the NWS, our core partners, and local community organizations to advance service equity within the weather enterprise will be known as Service Equity Team (SET) conferences.

Here is one example of the feedback received following the conference.

"I wanted to thank you all and congratulate you for an incredible conference today!! I truly applaud your commitment to diversifying your practices and making ongoing improvements to ensure that everyone can be safe. Like you all mentioned several times, today was just the start. These conversations and opportunities to build relationships are so vital to making long-term changes. It is amazing knowing that there are people like you all who want to make a difference and leave a positive footprint on the world, while opening up seats at the table to ensure that everyone has their voice heard. I thought the flow of the conference was wonderful, I enjoyed being a part of it both in-person and virtually! I am working on a report that focuses on similar themes discussed today – how we can build more equitable practices – and I will definitely be mentioning the conference as a must for more IDHS teams to attend in the future. It has been a pleasure connecting with you and I hope to cross-paths together soon. Thank you again! All the best, Eden Krumholz | Governor's Summer Intern Indiana Department of Homeland Security – Legal Team"



Attendees listen to a presentation at the Service Equity conference.



Left to right: Cody Moore, Kaily Gomez, Sam Lashley, Ted Funk



From left to right: Two Red Cross Volunteers, Red Cross Indiana Region Disaster Program Manager Loida Rodriguez, Kaily Gomez, and Cody Moore.



An online ASL interpreter presents to deaf and hard-of-hearing participants at the conference.