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## CU-Boulder Natural Hazards Center To Study Disaster Preparedness Among Nonprofits In San Francisco

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The University of Colorado at Boulder Natural Hazards Center will conduct a groundbreaking study of disaster preparedness among nonprofit organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area as part of a \$1.3 million grant.

The grant was announced today by the Fritz Institute, a San-Francisco-based nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the effectiveness of disaster relief operations around the world.

The services of numerous faith-based and community-based groups would be desperately needed in the event of a disaster and would include homeless shelters and free medical clinics, said CU-Boulder sociology Professor Kathleen Tierney, director of the Natural Hazards Center. Such groups provide a critical social safety net for the poor, elderly, disabled and many others.

"Almost nothing is known about the preparedness of nonprofit and community-based organizations for disasters," Tierney said.

"Those who rely on community-based services on a daily basis will need those services more than ever when a major disaster strikes. But will those organizations remain operational and able to provide support, or will they become disaster victims themselves?"

The CU-Boulder funding is the result of a large, multiyear grant to the Fritz Institute from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Walter and Elise Haas Fund, San Francisco Foundation and Pacific Gas & Electric Co., all based in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Fritz Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the effectiveness of disaster relief operations around the world.

The grant was announced at an April 17 news conference at San Francisco City Hall featuring Mayor Gavin Newsom. Tierney participated in the news conference.

The Hazards Center will work with the Fritz Institute to collect and analyze data on the preparedness of community-based and faith-based

organizations as part of the institute's efforts to strengthen critical "civic infrastructure" in the San Francisco Bay Area. The institute also is an advocate for improved preparedness measurement, as well as collaboration between local government, private and nonprofit sectors.

"Fritz Institute is pleased to partner with the University of Colorado's nationally recognized Natural Hazards Center for this groundbreaking study," said Lynn Fritz, founder and chairman of the institute. "Nonprofit and community-based organizations will be key players in helping many of society's most vulnerable members survive a major disaster."

The people who make the greatest use of the services offered by nonprofit and community-based organizations include the poor, the elderly, non-English speakers, people with

disabilities and those with chronic illnesses, Tierney said. A disaster that damages and disrupts the operation of community-based services could interrupt the delivery of their critical services.

For example, people in wheelchairs and others with disabilities may not be able to use elevators to access services during an electrical power outage caused by an earthquake, and people who are on oxygen may not have access to needed supplies. In the event of a major disaster, such people "will be on their own for days if not weeks," she said.

The CU-Boulder study will develop prototype methods of gathering information on the organizations' needs, vulnerabilities and ability to function during a disaster, she said. Part of the grant will be used to hire a postdoctoral researcher and a graduate student to do field work in the Bay Area.

The methods developed over the course of the study will later be made available by the Fritz Institute for use in communities throughout the country.

The CU-Boulder Natural Hazards Center, founded in 1976, is the nation's leading repository of knowledge on human behavior in disasters.

The center is part of CU-Boulder's Institute of Behavioral Science and is funded by grants from the National Science Foundation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, other federal agencies and private-sector funders.

More information on the CU-Boulder Natural Hazards Center is posted on the center's Web site at [www.colorado.edu/hazards](http://www.colorado.edu/hazards). More information on the Fritz Institute's Bay Area Preparedness Initiative can be found at the organization's Web site at [www.fritzinstitute.org](http://www.fritzinstitute.org).