CIVIC CAPACITY THROUGH SIMULATION FOR YOUTH: INSIGHTS FROM SONOMA COUNTY'S MODEL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Community outreach and education are essential to emergency management, fostering trust, preparedness, and future workforce capacity. Despite growing interest in youth-focused emergency management education, few programs utilize simulation-based learning approaches beyond emergency medicine, and limited guidance exists for agencies seeking to develop and sustain such initiatives. This study examines the Model Emergency Operations Center program developed by the Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management, a simulation-based educational program designed to introduce high school students to emergency management concepts, disaster preparedness, and public service careers. Using a qualitative research design, this study conducts interviews with key stakeholders involved in the program's development and execution. Thematic analysis identified four key components necessary for successful program replication and sustainability: program administration, schedule and timeline, recruitment, and project impact analysis.

Community outreach in the emergency management sector is critical for building relationships and trust with local communities and for empowering the next generation to pursue careers in the field. Educational programs offer valuable opportunities for community members to learn about professional pathways, avenues for engagement, and critical information on hazards and disasters. In the realm of emergency management education, learning opportunities are concentrated at the postsecondary level, with most programs offered through community colleges or universities (Asaka, 2023; Siedschlag, 2020) and the Federal Emergency

Management Agency's (FEMA) National Disaster and Emergency Management University (Federal Emergency Management Agency, n.d.). As a result, experiential learning (Danko, 2020), study abroad (Carey et al., 2022), and translational research models for communities (Feldman-Jensen, 2023) are largely inaccessible to younger populations. While there is considerable emphasis on emergency management education for higher education students, professionals, and adult community members, historically there have been few programs specifically designed for youth (Johnson et al., 2014; Khorram-Manesh, 2017).

To meet this need, the Model Emergency Operations Center (Model EOC) program was developed by the Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management in California. Launched in 2024, the program introduces high school students to the inner workings of the county's emergency operations center, as well as its mass shelter, communication systems, and preparedness activities (Brown, 2024). Model EOC has attracted national attention in the field since receiving the 2024 USA Preparedness Award at the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) Annual Conference. The Model EOC program adopts the roles and responsibilities of an emergency operations center. It creates a simulation-based learning experience similar to the Model United Nations (MUN) learning method (Khadzir & Sumarmi, 2020). This method is described as an ideal model for today's students, as it builds communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and innovation skills within a social studies context (Khadzir & Sumarmi, 2020).

The Model EOC program brings together stakeholders from diverse areas of emergency operations, county communications and public information, state emergency operations, and mass care/social work to expose students to the range of roles and responsibilities within the field. Students receive general preparedness information, including a starter go bag (a portable emergency kit containing essential supplies and other items needed for an emergency) and a preparedness planning guide (a resource that provides instructions and recommendations to help individuals or households prepare for emergencies). These materials are important components of the student experience, as a go bag enables immediate, safe evacuation during disasters (Sonoma County Emergency Readiness, Response and Recovery, 2026), and a preparedness planning guide supports proactive planning and personal resiliency. Students participate in this program for a variety of reasons, including interest in public service or personal lived experience of a disaster; they are exposed to real-world applications and gain a deeper understanding of how their community responds to and recovers from disasters. These experiences help students develop an appreciation for their local officials and the complexities of disasters, strengthen critical thinking and collaboration among peers, and prepare for future academic and professional pathways as they complete their high school education.

Given the limited literature on simulation-based emergency management training for youth populations (Khorram-Manesh, 2017), there remains a need not only to evaluate program outcomes but also to document how such programs can be successfully designed, implemented, and sustained. While participant evaluations provide valuable insight into program effectiveness,

they offer limited guidance for agencies seeking to adopt similar efforts. Therefore, using a qualitative research design, we interviewed 15 stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the Model EOC program to identify the key considerations necessary for successful program replication and sustainability. Through thematic analysis, four core components emerged, providing practical guidance for agencies and departments seeking to implement similar youth-focused emergency management programs: replication and sustainability; program administration; schedule and timeline; recruitment; and project impact. By outlining these key components, this study offers a practice-informed framework to support the replication of Model EOC-style programs and expand access to emergency management education, workforce development, and preparedness opportunities for high school students.

RELATED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Emergency management is a profession that coordinates and integrates the activities needed to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters (Waugh, 2007). To the best of our knowledge, there are currently no programs in the emergency management sector, aside from Model EOC, that are designed as simulation-based learning experiences for high school students specifically focused on emergency operations. However, existing initiatives, including Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) and related emergency management and medical programs, do succeed in introducing broader community members to the field of emergency management and fostering the development of practical skills.

The Community Emergency Response Team Program

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program started as a pilot program in 1985 with the Los Angeles Fire Department (Bush, 2018; FEMA, 2025; Simpson, 2001). For the first few years, the model remained largely local within California, with some communities either forming their own CERTs or similar organizations (Simpson, 2001). By the early 1990s, the program spread to several states with varying degrees of success, but lacked standardized training and organizational methods (Simpson, 2001). In 1993, FEMA formally adopted and endorsed the CERT program, which, with this support and standardization, fostered growth and resulted in CERT programs in all 50 states and several U.S. territories (Bush, 2018; Carr & Jensen, 2015; FEMA, 2025; Simpson, 2001). Despite federal endorsement and standardization of certain training materials, the degree to which CERT programs are integrated into local communities and financially supported varies considerably. The original host institution, the Los Angeles Fire Department, benefited from corporate sponsorship through Chevron. In contrast, more contemporary iterations rely on a range of support models, including partnerships with local emergency management agencies, collaborations with nonprofits such as the Red Cross or healthcare coalitions, or the formation of independent nonprofit organizations that can fundraise locally to sustain CERT operations (Carr & Jensen, 2015; Simpson, 2001). This demonstrates that although CERT provides a semi-structured approach that allows flexibility so that “each is unique to its local community” (FEMA, 2025), funding sources exhibit significant variability and, at times, instability.

In addition to traditional adult-focused CERT programs, some jurisdictions offer Teen CERT through local or school-based programs. Focused on adolescents aged 13–18, Teen CERT helps teenagers develop leadership skills and assists with their school's emergency preparedness through a training program of 16–20 hours in topics such as personal disaster preparedness, medical operations, search and rescue, basic first aid, fire safety, and terrorism and hazardous materials (FEMA, 2012; Los Altos Hills County Fire Department, n.d.). After program completion, graduates are encouraged to join their school's Teen CERT club (if available) or to join the local adult CERT group for additional training and engagement.

Despite Teen CERT's growing presence in the U.S., the program and its goals differ functionally from those of the Model EOC program. In particular, Teen CERT programs typically do not include training critical to developing future emergency managers, such as disaster leadership and operations, incident management, crisis communication, and social vulnerability and mass care after disasters. Moreover, variability in funding models and training materials across adult and adolescent CERT programs underscores the need for further research on how to design youth-focused emergency management education with sustainable funding mechanisms and inform successful practices that support replication, long-term outreach, workforce exposure, and program longevity.

High School-Based Programs

High school extracurricular activities and programs offer a promising avenue for exposing students to a variety of career fields. They can produce outcomes that extend beyond traditional classroom learning and provide early exposure to future professional pathways, particularly through simulation-based learning experiences. Examples of well-known simulation-based learning experiences include Mock Trial and Model United Nations (Model UN), which offer middle school, high school, and undergraduate students opportunities to explore careers in law, political science, and international relations through a hands-on, problem-based approach (Hazelton & Jacob, 1982).

Many educators and researchers support this teaching method and note improvements made to the learning process through the opportunity these activities provide for hands-on learning, which results in improved critical thinking skills, oration skills, and greater depth of understanding for the topic in general (Amani U., 2025; Blair et al., 2017; Coticchia et al., 2019; Khadzir & Sumarmi, 2020). Despite the popularity of the Model UN program, there have been limited efforts to directly assess student learning outcomes since 1984 (Jesuit & Endless, 2018). Findings from a pre-post study by Jesuit and Endless (2018) revealed that students improved their general knowledge of Model UN after the conference, particularly in nuanced areas such as UN Peacekeeping and the UN Security Council. The findings suggest that students changed their attitudes towards international relations and adopted a more "realist" view" after participating in the simulation (Jesuit & Endless, 2018). For instance, in some scenarios, students initially viewed the topic as relatively unimportant to their everyday lives, but after completing the simulation, they recognized its importance and adjusted their school and career plans to more

closely align with their recent experience (Coticchia et al., 2019). Such findings suggest the value of the Model UN approach for students and also highlight the need for continued research on simulation-based programs for youth and undergraduates.

Although simulation-based programs in career and technical education are included in extracurriculars such as Model UN, the incorporation of emergency management training into high school career-based education remains limited, with a predominant focus on emergency medicine. With this, students typically prepare for careers in emergency medicine by earning an Emergency Medical Technician – Basic (EMT-B) certificate or by taking pre-nursing and medical courses. Following a rebrand and curriculum shift in 2024 from the Urban Assembly School for Emergency Management to the Urban Assembly Early College High School of Emergency Medicine, this public high school in New York City provides students with educational pathways into emergency medicine, nursing, science, and public health careers (The Urban Assembly Early College High School of Emergency Medicine, n.d.). In addition, programs such as the Simulation Academy offered through the Yale School of Medicine (2024) encourage New Haven High School students to explore health-related careers through 10 interactive sessions, where students learn tasks such as how to insert intravenous medication, deliver a baby, perform CPR, and perform endotracheal intubation and chest tube procedures. While these two leading U.S. programs incorporate simulation-based learning, they primarily focus on healthcare-related career pathways rather than the broader field of emergency and disaster management. Consequently, students may receive limited exposure to topics such as the Incident Command System, crisis leadership, logistics and finance, social vulnerability, and the evolution of crisis management in the U.S., highlighting a gap in youth-focused disaster management education and exposure.

Emergency Management: A Discipline of Disciplines

Given that emergency management, similar to policing, is a "discipline of disciplines" (Comiskey et al., 2021a), it is critical to expand emergency education beyond hands-on healthcare. The Model EOC program is novel in that it provides students with a space to explore public safety careers beyond emergency medicine, including crisis communications, public relations, social services, police and firefighting, and emergency management, while expanding their understanding of how Sonoma County operates during a disaster. Simulation-based learning, whether in policing and homeland security education, mock trial, or politics, has been well documented to provide meaningful benefits by fostering deeper understanding and engagement (Coticchia et al., 2019; Georgian & Thornburg, 2024; Comiskey et al., 2021b). Given the established benefits of interactive simulation education in these fields, such programs have transferable value and could be adapted effectively for use beyond law, medicine, and international politics.

This study explores the transferable value of simulation education and addresses a dual gap in youth-focused emergency management education: few initiatives (a) harness the pedagogical advantages of simulation-based learning, and (b) provide structured, replicable guidance that

other jurisdictions can adopt, from planning and funding acquisition through implementation, to support long-term sustainability and success. To investigate this, we interviewed 15 instructors, volunteers, and professionals involved in developing and administering the 2025 Model EOC program. Using Model EOC as an illustrative case study, the main objective of this research was to document key insights, offering guidance and practice-informed considerations that can aid other emergency management organizations and related agencies in implementing similar programs, while addressing common concerns regarding sustainability, operational feasibility, and resource requirements. Specifically, this paper answers the following question: Drawing from the simulation-based Model EOC Program, what strategies and best practices can inform the replication of youth-focused, simulation-based emergency management programs in other jurisdictions?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the development, implementation, and sustainability of the Model EOC program, as well as its replication across jurisdictions. Using a combined literature review and semi-structured interview approach, this exploratory study aimed to provide recommendations for replicating Model EOC. The interview questions were developed by the research team, including 10 questions designed to explore stakeholders' experiences and perspectives on the program. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom, and 15 participants, representing 75% of the target population (i.e., 20 stakeholders), were interviewed. These 15 individuals were presenters and organizers who were involved in planning and executing Model EOC. Personally identifiable information was redacted in the results. The interview data were analyzed using an iterative coding thematic analysis process (Morgan & Nica, 2020). Specifically, using an expected coding approach with predetermined themes from the interview guide and questions, we refined our process to include expanded codes (primary and subcodes) that emerged in the transcripts (participants' responses) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Simultaneous analysis occurred in a recurring cycle across themes, coding, and descriptions.

The online shared server Taguette was used as the shared system leveraged for the transcript coding (Rampin & Rampin, 2021). Through the iterative process, a total of 10 codes were identified from stakeholder responses: six primary codes (documentation, scheduling, funding, recruitment, implementation, and recommendations) and four subcodes (partnership, program impact, presenter management, and timeline). Next, we identified recurring patterns and concepts across the 10 codes and synthesized them into four main categories or themes to develop actionable recommendations for jurisdictions seeking to implement similar initiatives. The four categories that represent the targeted areas for actionable recommendations entail program administration, schedule and timeline, recruitment, and program impact analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight repeatable actions that other jurisdictions can take to establish a youth-based emergency management program like Model EOC.

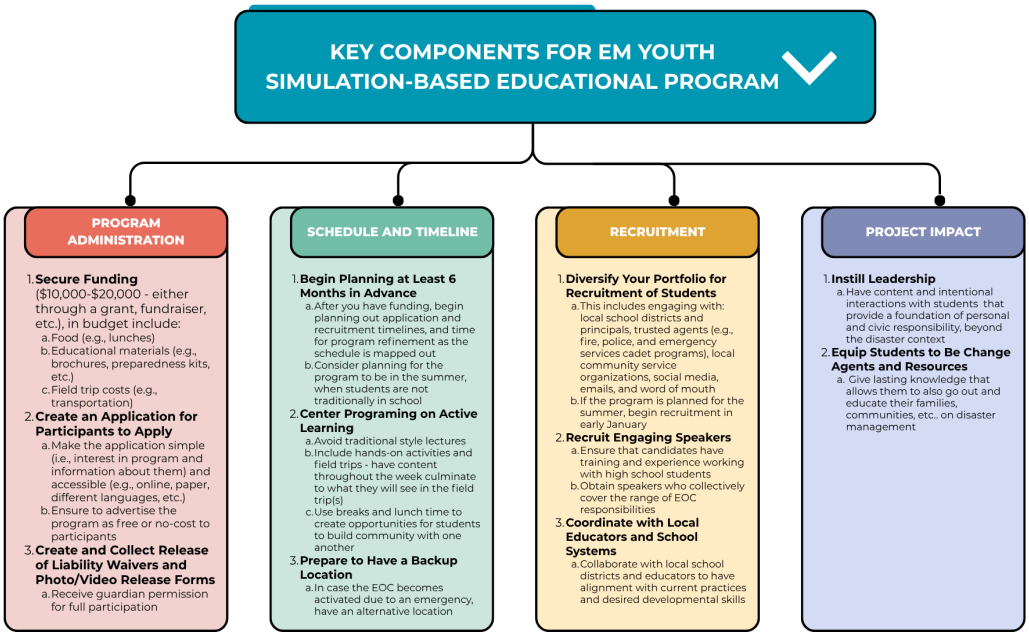


Figure 1. Overview of transferable lessons and practice-informed considerations for implementing an emergency simulation-based educational program.

Program Administration

Program administration includes overseeing the documentation, funding, and logistical processes needed to establish the program. As many interviewees noted, any program at scale begins with the initial concept and financial resources. The Sonoma County Model EOC program was funded through the State Homeland Security Grant Program, but there are limitations on grant funding that may not cover all the costs associated with such a program:

> It [the grant] didn't cover the cost of food; only the brochures, backpacks we give the kids, the field trip … We do feed the children every day because we weren't sure what would happen if there were kids who couldn't afford to buy lunch, and they would end up not getting to eat all day…. It's a few thousand dollars to feed the students lunch every day and then have snacks and drinks available so that they can maintain their energy level all day long. So we're looking at less than $20,000, including the field trip, for the program. We could do it on ten grand, if we had to. So it's not a huge ask, but it's a huge benefit … it allows students to get into a place of understanding the emergency process that they would never get to otherwise for decades in their career. (Participant #8)

In addition, there was concern and an intentional effort to make the program free or as low-cost as possible, recognizing that tuition may not be feasible for students from low-income families. Participant 7 highlighted that such programs should be available to all: "I definitely think grant-driven is the way to go. I don't think that students should be charged for this. It's public service. It's outreach. And I think that all walks of life should be able to do it, not just those who can afford tuition." Several participants recommended seeking new partnerships and secure donations from local businesses or grocery stores to supplement grant funding from local, state, and federal sources. These resources could help offset transportation and meal costs, which may otherwise pose barriers to participation for students who lack access to school-provided transportation and meal services during the summer.

Parental Approval

Given that the program involves minors under 18, documentation was a vital component to ensure regulatory grant and legal compliance. The first step was a basic application with open-ended questions to "assess student interest and a little bit about them" (Participant 6). After admission to the program, students were required to have a parent or guardian complete a release-of-liability waiver and a photo/video release form. The program provided students with a professionally bound workbook and a go-bag backpack containing preparedness items, such as a flashlight and a weather radio. Students and staff praised the backpack for its practicality beyond the Model EOC program, encouraging personal and family disaster preparedness for years to come.

Equity

Equity was a concern among the study's participants, and they highlighted the importance of having application and recruitment materials in the predominant languages of the area (in this case, English and Spanish). Overall, they emphasized the need to maximize student and parent engagement by ensuring that the proper documentation is in place for minors to participate in a county-sponsored daytime program. It was noted that "the less information that's private that we collect is probably better. Addresses are probably something that a lot of students, particularly in a pretty Hispanic-dominant center of a county—or center of the city … would be hesitant to give to someone during this climate right now" (Participant 9). Participants also identified the importance of addressing student needs by providing take-home materials, meals, transportation, and hands-on simulation activities, and ensuring the program remains equitable and accessible to students from diverse backgrounds, including those with differing socioeconomic circumstances and learning needs such as neurodivergence.

Scheduling and Timeline

Scheduling and timeline encompass the planning period for organizing the program, developing the agenda and content, coordinating activities, and establishing contingency plans to address situations in which materials or activities cannot be delivered as originally intended. The planning process for Model EOC begins early, with an anticipated six-month period that includes

application, recruitment, and program refinement. Six months was consistently identified as a great starting point for developing a similar program, as "it will ensure you have enough time to be able to get [a] program and not feel like you are rushing into it" (Participant 6). Additionally, Participant 1 recommended that the best way is to start backward: "working backward in the delivery of—or the development of—the schedule, making sure that it was meaningful [for the students] … that there were always takeaways for the community coming in and stepping into this class."

The program was scheduled for five business days (Monday–Friday) to accommodate space constraints and presenter availability, and to align with the summer months when students are not in school. Days typically ran from around 10 am to 4 pm. Presentations covered a variety of topics, including an introduction to the Incident Command System, social vulnerability and mass care in disasters, crisis communication, and included field trips to partner sites. Given the participants' ages and preference for active learning, we developed nontraditional activities to move away from lecture-style approaches. For example, during the session on crisis communication, students had to participate in a puzzle activity, with Participant 5 serving as the activity facilitator:

> There was, I think, about 20 students … so we divided them into, like, four teams of five. And I gave them each a jigsaw puzzle—a pretty easy jigsaw puzzle for little kids. It's a 20-piece jigsaw puzzle or something. And there were four different ones, and I gave each group a jigsaw puzzle, but before the exercise started, I took one piece out of each puzzle and traded it with a different puzzle, so if you completed the puzzle, you'd have one piece left over that doesn't fit your puzzle, and I wanted to see what would happen when they got to that step. So I said, here's your puzzle. As a group, work together and put your puzzle together. So it only took them, you know, five minutes or so to put the puzzle together, and then the first team that finished had a missing piece and then one extra piece that didn't fit. And they're like, huh, what do I do with this? And then one of the teams finally said, I think … this piece goes to a different puzzle. So they went over and they traded their piece for the correct piece, and they got it right. And then … as each group … got to the end, they realized they needed to trade their piece for another piece. So I wanted to demonstrate that in an EOC … the PIO, the public information officer, has to be sort of the puzzle master … if you don't have all the pieces, you need to know where to get them, and you need to go find the piece … that you need to complete your puzzle, or in an EOC to get … all of the information that you need for the public. (Participant 5)

Lunchtime was emphasized as an essential period for students, not only to nourish their bodies but also to build community and engage in group activities (Participant 12). Field trips were noted as the highlight of the program for many students and have expanded from the first to the second iteration. Now, students get to visit the "actual shelter buildings, one of our larger shelter buildings that has a Conex container adjacent to it, where we keep a lot of our care and shelter supplies that we would use for either a temporary evacuation point at that location" (Participant 4), as well as the CAL FIRE base and sheriff's helicopter at their local facilities (Participant 6).

Future planners should consider including one or more field trips, as they have been shown to engage students and provide a weekly activity to look forward to, thereby increasing participation in the content leading up to the field trip. Given that the program was hosted by the Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management, most of it was held on-site at their emergency operations center, which could complicate operations, should a disaster occur or the center be activated. This happened during the first Model EOC program in 2024, when an active wildfire (the Point Fire) in the county prompted the center to activate. "While the students actually got to see what an EOC looks like during an activation, it was not planned. But we had a fire, and therefore that turned into part of their curriculum" (Participant 4). Model EOC programs should be established within a local EOC or a similar coordinating center for the jurisdiction, through the city administration, fire department, or police department. However, it is recommended to have a backup facility in place, should the primary location need to be activated or used in response to a real-world emergency.

Recruitment

Recruitment involves strategies used to identify and attract both student participants and guest speakers for the program. The first recommendation was to start early. The program poses both an opportunity and a challenge for students, given their various demands during the summer months. Being on the radar of parents, students, and civic organizations by early January allows time for students to submit applications and balance other commitments they may have over the summer (Participant 8). Participants recommended diversifying the portfolio for recruitment, including engagement with the local school districts and principals (Participant 1), trusted agents like fire, police, and emergency services cadet programs (Participant 2), and local community service organizations like 4H, as well as via social media platforms, email blasts, and the powerful word-of-mouth recruitment that builds year after year (Participant 1). Interest in such a program is niche for most high school students, therefore targeted promotion is critical: students with "family connections to either emergency management or EMS or firefighting or [a] public safety field [might be eager to participate]" (Participant 3).

Presenter recruitment was also identified as a critical aspect of the program "because you can do all the backbone and do all the work, but if you don't have good speakers that are going to be able to teach and keep the students engaged" (Participant 6), the success of the program will be impacted. One notable aspect of presenter recruitment was ensuring that candidates had training and experience working with high school students, rather than solely with adults or in traditional emergency management education. Presenters "need to be able to tweak this material or change this material … to make it more digestible or more compelling" (Participant 3). Additionally, there are well-recognized challenges to integrating emergency management concepts into a new program; the process is inherently complex and requires multidisciplinary perspectives to illuminate the field and enhance participants' learning experiences effectively (Kiltz, 2012). As such, speakers should collectively represent the breadth and depth of EOC operations to accurately reflect the range of roles, responsibilities, and expertise involved in emergency management.

As a best practice, it is vital to involve local school districts in the planning process, advise educators on the desired participant level (e.g., high school or middle school), and collaborate with educational professionals to design activities that promote classroom engagement aligned with participants' developmental and educational levels. There may even be opportunities to systematically align Model EOC program outcomes with a local education department to "weave into CTE [career technical education] pathways, senior projects" (Participant 14). Coordination with local educators and the education system provides a practical way to improve recruitment outcomes and ensure that learning objectives are met while maintaining student interest throughout the program week.

Program Impact

Project impact includes perceived improvements in students' leadership abilities, understanding, or self-efficacy related to emergency preparedness, based on experiences and knowledge gained through the program. Participant 2 discusses this in their reflections on volunteering with the second iteration of the Model EOC program in 2025:

> I think to have the students get a sense of their role as leaders, not only in the training, but also when they take it to their own lives, go back to school, whatever they're going to do, that everyone really is a leader in some respect. And I think instilling that with them and respecting them is huge. So I think reiterating that, repeating that throughout, and then some key information about disasters in general … that they take that [knowledge they have gained] back to their communities, and they can be a resource when they go back out [into the community]. (Participant 2)

The stakeholders interviewed consistently described the program as having a meaningful impact on participants' understanding of emergency management careers, emergency operations, or community preparedness. Although a formal evaluation of participant learning outcomes was outside the scope of this study, student feedback further supported these perceptions. Following the inaugural program, the 17 participating students completed an evaluation survey and reported high levels of satisfaction, rating the overall Model EOC program 4.63 out of 5, the extent to which the program met their expectations 4.56 out of 5, how informative they found the program 4.81 out of 5, and how interesting they found the program 4.63 out of 5. Additionally, 100% of participants indicated that they would recommend the program to a friend. While these measures do not directly assess learning outcomes or behavioral change, they suggest that participants viewed the program positively and perceived value in the knowledge and experiences gained. Speaking to the program's influence on potential leadership development and the application of learned concepts within their communities, students made statements such as "I believe they [other students] should participate in this program because it not only teaches you preparedness for such disasters, which with global warming are becoming more and more prevalent, but it also shapes you into a possible resource for these disasters," "Taking this class blossoms students into vital members of Sonoma County and helps spread disaster-prep awareness," and "Students can

gain a broad understanding of how the EOC responds to different disasters, and they can implement their new knowledge in their own lives." Students can also spread the word about disaster preparedness, which is important since we in Sonoma County are always wary of fire season and earthquakes."

One student enthusiastically stated, "I had a ton of fun! I'm definitely interested in emergency management now. Thank you so much for having me! I can't underplay just how much safer learning about all this made me feel. Thank you for giving me the reassurance that these incredibly kind and smart people are on my side in the face of a disaster. Thank you!" Beyond raising awareness of emergency management careers, this comment highlights how the program may foster greater preparedness and confidence among participants while strengthening trust in local emergency management and public safety personnel. Collectively, stakeholder observations and participant feedback indicate that the Model EOC program may serve as a valuable mechanism to increase awareness of emergency management careers, emergency preparedness activities, and the role of emergency operations centers, while fostering community engagement.

CONCLUSION

Unlike a traditional after-action review focused on improving the performance of a specific event or team, this study examined stakeholder perspectives on the design and implementation of the Model EOC program to identify transferable practices that may support replication in other communities. By systematically examining the perspectives of stakeholders involved in the program's design and implementation, the study provides insights that contribute to both emergency management practice and research. This study demonstrates how simulation and experientially based, youth-focused programs represent an important opportunity within emergency management and points to the need for mechanisms that enable agencies to replicate such efforts. As communities continue to grapple with increasingly complex risks and youth are exposed to hazards within their communities, the need for well-prepared, civically engaged youth to enter public service has never been more pressing. The Model EOC program in Sonoma County addresses contemporary challenges by offering an experiential, simulation-based summer program for high school students that addresses gaps in available training and capacity. The Model EOC program successfully introduced youth participants to the technical and operational components of emergency management, tailored to their educational levels, and integrated students from various high schools, thereby fostering leadership, responsibility, and community engagement.

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the design and execution of the Model EOC program and to document key considerations for replication in jurisdictions beyond Sonoma County, including early planning, funding strategies, strong partnerships with local education systems, and tactics for recruiting students and presenters. As Participant 2 concluded, "there's quite a bright future for it [Model EOC], especially because our environment is changing so rapidly, and we really do need people to be in public service. So no matter what, even volunteerism, I think that … it's going to be great for public safety if we have more kids

involved." Ultimately, the outlined transferable insights and practice-informed guidance illustrate how other agencies can invest and prepare the next generation for this professional pathway.

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