

Cooperative Faith-Based
Disaster Recovery
In Your Community

Why, What & How



**CHURCH WORLD SERVICE
EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROGRAM**

Cooperative Faith-Based Disaster Recovery In Your Community: *Why, What & How*

The Problem of Unmet Needs

Following a disaster, many people and organizations immediately respond. A major role of faith community response is addressing those needs that other disaster responders do not address.

“Unmet Needs” refer to basic life-sustaining needs for which there is not an immediately accessible resource. Obviously, needs identified in the early hours or days of a disaster will be much different than those identified in the weeks and months following the disaster. At the same time, different agencies provide different services in the so called emergency, relief/reponse/recovery, and long-term recovery phases following a disaster.

During the emergency phase, first responders include family, neighbors, and local emergency response personnel such as fire fighters, police, and search and rescue. The primary tasks are to get people to safety, administer emergency medical care, and restore order. Other response agencies may include: National Guard or Civil Defense, American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, and other community-based organizations. Services provided will depend upon need, but may include: food, water, shelter, medical supplies, clothing, transportation, security, debris removal, and other specialized services.

As the immediate emergency subsides, and the community moves into the stabilizing phase of relief and initial recovery, assistance may be offered in the form of material goods, volunteers, services such as debris removal or assessment, and other assistance programs. When the impact of the disaster is such that it outstrips the capability of the local community to respond and adequately recover, additional assistance may come to the community in the form of state and federal governmental programs, other voluntary agen-

cies, and upper levels of faith-based disaster response organizations.

A Presidential Declaration in a major disaster carries the ultimate menu of services including temporary housing, low interest loans, grants, legal services, tax relief, food programs, unemployment compensation, and a variety of material goods such as building supplies that address other basic needs. Many assistance programs are not available without such an official declaration.

In the long term recovery phase, which may last months or even years, those individuals and families with adequate insurance, personal resources, minor damage, or who readily benefit from assistance programs will fully recover and move on with their lives. Those without adequate resources, either access other assistance themselves or through advocates or are resigned to an insufficient recovery. Indeed, serious unmet needs may become evident.

With all the assistance programs and insurance available, how can persons remain with unmet needs?

- People may find their insurance coverage to be inadequate
- Even with disaster loans and grants, people may not be able to pay for all the repairs needed to make their homes safe, sanitary, and secure
- Persons were vulnerable to economic stress, health issues, and access to services prior to the disaster

Who is most likely to experience disaster-caused unmet needs?

Population groups who are most at risk of being unable to survive or appropriately recover from the disaster include:

- Older persons, children, and women
- Those with physical and mental disabilities
- Cultural and ethnic minorities
- Persons with language or literacy barriers

- Those who are economically vulnerable because of employment, legal/citizenship status, and education

Recovery at a physical level—i.e. restoration of stable housing, access to food, employment, and health care—is historically most difficult for these persons because of their social and economic status prior to the disaster's occurrence.

Long Term Recovery Efforts in a Disaster-Affected Community

Coordinated and collaborative recovery efforts of community organizations lead to the best possible recovery of disaster survivors. These often take the form of 1) a community-based effort including secular, voluntary, and faith-based participants or 2) a faith-based recovery program alone. Scope of the disaster, identified needs and resources, and available or interested participants are likely to be the most influential forces in determining the structure of the long term recovery mechanism. Usually, the most sustainable structure is created by residents in the affected community.

Recovery organizations vary across the county, but in general are 1) Unmet Needs Committees 2) Long Term Recovery Committees 3) Long Term Recovery Organizations and 4) Interfaith (or Faith-based) Recovery Organizations.

Unmet Needs Committees may stand alone or be a part of any one of the other three models. In them, a group of people and/or agencies meet to review case work, identify needs, and gather resources to address the needs. Today, they are often called Long Term Recovery Committees (LTRCs) recognizing their role in the overall recovery of a community, not just individuals. In this model, most participants remain autonomous.

In **Long Term Recovery Organizations (LTROs)**, a number of supporters pledge support to a unified program. An LTRO may be a part of an LTRC.

Interfaith or Faith-based Recovery Organizations may initiate, host, be a part of, or function as any of these models. The name merely identifies the model as primarily being operated by the faith community. Regardless of the form and structure, religious groups, and people of faith should always be heavily involved in the work of recovery efforts.

The Role of the Faith-Based Disaster Recovery Organization

Following a disaster, many people and organizations immediately respond. But, rarely do they have as their mission, or understand, the long-term work required to restore a community. For complete recovery following a disaster, the local religious community needs to not only become involved, but also be committed to its role as a conduit of resources and advocacy for the long term.

Through faith-based community organizations, churches and other religious groups along with other agencies can work together to assure the most complete recovery following a disaster. Within the context of a community organization, they can most effectively assure that needs are identified and addressed without wasteful duplication of services. A formal, coordinated, cooperative faith-based community disaster response can avoid situations such as occurred in one southern town when a community fund and several churches all purchased rebuilding materials, but the shingles, plywood, and sheet rock lay idle around damaged homes because groups provided no volunteers for repairs and reconstruction.

When large numbers of marginalized people have been affected by a disaster, the faith-based community organization can make a particularly important contribution in the disaster response and long-term recovery.

Any or all of these seven key activities may characterize a faith-based community disaster response:

Referrals. Survivors may be referred to other private and public helping agencies as their needs are matched to appropriate services.

Education. Survivors learn about entitlements and how to help themselves. Those intimidated by bureaucratic red tape learn about the system. Community education emphasizes preparedness, prevention, mitigation so the next disaster will have reduced impact.

Volunteers and Volunteer Coordination.

Experienced and skilled people and organizations, both within and outside the community, may volunteer for work in family advocacy, rebuilding and repair, and other areas of the recovery process.

Advocacy. Advocacy can take many forms of action by, with, or on behalf of disaster survivors. Examples include: assistance in filling out forms, providing information that could mitigate future risk or damages, identifying a special populations and helping them voice their needs, and researching possible assistance resources. Occasionally advocacy roles may be confrontative, as when technological or hazardous materials components are present, and public policy issues need to be raised. But most often, advocacy simply entails helping people get benefits to which they are entitled or helping develop resources when there are none.

Monetary Assistance. Cash assistance grants may be available to address serious unmet needs. During the long term recovery phase, these grants would be made following case work.

Pastoral and Spiritual Care. Often a supportive presence that communicates caring and understanding is the most important part of pastoral care when people are grieving loss of life or a way of life. In the long term recovery phase, even when physical needs have been met, disaster survivors often continue to need assistance in working through grief, anger, loss, and isolation.

Management of Donated Resources. A faith-based disaster response organization can also play an important role in managing donations sent directly to a community—food, clothing, furniture, appliances, building supplies, money.

A Simple Operations Model

A local faith-based community disaster response organization does not need to be an elaborate operation. A director and office manager-volunteer coordinator may be the only staff necessary. Donated or shared office space in a church, fire station, community center, or other accessible community facility is often sufficient.

Properly trained and managed volunteers can do most of the work required, including:

- Surveying damaged areas
- Case work and survivor advocacy
- Office work, data base maintenance
- Repair and construction
- Hosting, orienting, supervising, and debriefing volunteers

Getting Things Going

There are no secret formulas or miracle funding sources that assure the success of a faith-based community disaster recovery organization. Build it on two cornerstones: A program addressing identified unmet needs. Communication that builds appreciation for the work being done. Here's a quick how-to-do-it checklist:

- Set up a broadly representative, inclusive board of directors to oversee the organization.** People representing the varied populations affected by the disaster plug the organization into the needs and generate acceptance throughout the community. Wide community ownership of the organization and its program facilitates fundraising efforts.
- Establish a fiscal entity.** The organization needs a public identity and fiscal structure for fundraising. Answer these questions: Is a new organization required? Can the faith-based response function under an existing group? What should it be called? Who will function as fiscal agent?

✔ **Write and publicize a short mission or purpose statement that focuses work and communication of the organization in just a few sentences.** It should include a description of groups participating in the organization and may encompass the primary objective and program overview.

✔ **Look for unmet needs and match them to resources.** Liaison with other care-giving agencies and learn how they are responding. Initiate a long term recovery committee or become involved with the one that has been started. Consider a door-to-door survey. Consider the unique contributions the religious community can make to the disaster recovery: pastoral care, volunteers for rebuilding and repair, public policy and family advocacy, etc.

✔ **Seek staff and volunteers to address needs.** Project a realistic budget and program length. Estimate expected cash and in-kind income from community and local/regional/national religious organizations. Review program needs and establish criteria for assistance. Revise budget up or down as required.

✔ **Publicize cash funding and in-kind donation needs.** Communicate changing program/budget information on regular basis to public and donors.

How Church World Service Helps

Church World Service facilitates cooperative faith-based community response to disaster, but neither manages nor finances programs. It assists via:

Counsel and training. CWS Disaster Response and Recovery Liasons provide organizational, program development, budget, fundraising, and public relations advice and link developing interfaith groups to program and funding resources. *Managing and Operating the Faith-Based Recovery Organization*—a CWS manual—is a valuable day-to-day resource for boards of directors

and staffs of faith-based community disaster response organizations who manage and implement program.

Program seed money. CWS provides seed grants up to \$5,000 as start-up funds to allow faith-based disaster response programs to begin their work. CWS normally cannot provide major funding.

Material resources support. Although the government, other secular agencies, and local churches provide mass relief assistance following a disaster, CWS fills important material resources gaps through denominations, interfaith groups, and other organizations related to the religious community. Blankets and “Gifts of the Heart” relief kits are supplied to a disaster site as needed and requested. CWS also solicits in-kind donations and special funding from corporations and other private sources to meet special unmet needs.

Communication. CWS keeps the religious community and public informed about disasters, needs of survivors, and relief and recovery programs of churches and faith-based organizations through appeals and other communication channels. This supports local efforts to acquire funds from national denominations and communions that participate in the CWS Emergency Response Program and stimulates public contributions.

The Religious Community Claiming Its Unique Role

Through a cooperative faith-based community recovery organization, the religious community claims its unique role in disaster response. When other groups have completed or concluded their assistance programs, churches and other faith groups are often the only ones to follow through on unmet needs. In cooperation with others in their community, they can do the job effectively and efficiently, helping to assure full recovery.

Church World Service Emergency Response Information Sources

Publications

- Cooperative Faith-Based Disaster Recovery in Your Community: Why, What & How
- The Disaster Response Chaplain: Bringing God's Presence to Trauma Victims
- Managing and Operating the Faith-Based Recovery Organization
- Prepare to Care: Church Response to Disaster
- The Religious Community as Disaster Educator: Planning, Prevention & Mitigation
- The Silent Disaster: People of Faith Respond to Technological Disasters

For additional information on resources, contact

CWS Emergency Response
475 Riverside Drive (7th Floor)
New York, NY 10115
Telephone: (212) 870-3151
Fax: (212) 870-2236
Worldwide Web Site: www.cwserp.org



**CHURCH WORLD SERVICE
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Church World Service
Emergency Response Program

*36 Denominations Working Together to Meet Human
Need*

475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115
Telephone: (212) 870-3151 Fax: (212) 870-2236
Worldwide Web Site: www.cwserp.org

For Additional Information, please contact

CWS DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY LIAISON

Name: _____

Street: _____

City: _____

State _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____