

## OVERVIEW: THE COMMUNITY-BASED RECOVERY EFFORT



Many agencies and organizations with different programs will respond to disaster in your community. A community-based recovery group focuses primarily on *long-term recovery* when disaster survivors try to rebuild their lives. Long-term recovery follows the *emergency phase* of disaster response (when emphasis is on protecting life and property) and the *relief phase* (which emphasizes a safe and secure environment for temporary day-to-day living, accessing early assistance, and planning next steps).

In the emergency and relief phases, response is agency-based. *Individual* agencies – i.e., police and fire departments -- respond when the disaster initially strikes. Then *individual* government and private sector agencies with established service programs provide assistance – i.e., food, clothing, shelter, and health care.

*Community*-based programs characterized by collaborative, cooperative, and coordinated efforts among agencies become necessary as resources grow increasingly scarce and needs emerge which individual care-giving agencies are not prepared to address alone. Housing repair and rebuilding, for example, is frequently an unmet need addressed by community-based recovery programs because private insurance payments and government assistance often do not cover the full cost.

Community-based recovery groups emphasize response to the physical as well as spiritual/ emotional needs of those who are most vulnerable to disaster. Because elements necessary for healing are often already present in the disaster-affected community, they strive to maximize resources -- existing churches, community services, and volunteer programs. They do not deploy human energy and time or precious financial resources to build duplicate structures, but rather *coordinate* connection of available resources and service providers with those in need.

Within this context, their primary roles include:

- Resource development to benefit individuals and the community
- Case work and assessments that identify family needs and facilitate appropriate provision of resources to meet those needs
- Volunteer coordination
- Assuring provision of spiritual and emotional care
- Advocacy on behalf of disaster survivors who do not receive adequate assistance because they were ignored or missed by other care-giving organizations
- Donations management

In the process, they seek to:

- Promote maximum community participation and self-help in all phases of disaster response
- Preserve family unity and enable families to quickly resume or continue functioning
- Respect cultural, traditional, and religious sentiments of the community and use them to increase community resiliency
- Allocate resources to the greatest extent possible to activities which have lasting benefits and avoid duplication of benefits
- Safeguard interests of the persons most vulnerable
- Insure fair distribution of assistance on the basis of need and in a manner that avoids undermining a person's self-reliance or accentuating the bias of others

Historically, the religious community – compelled by faith and a commitment to equitable distribution of recovery resources – assumed responsibility for addressing long-term recovery needs through cooperation among its members. In today's world, it is safe to assume that at least one of several cooperative structures – secular and religious -- is in place as a foundation for developing community-based long-term recovery groups: a human services resource coordinating table, a local/regional Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), a ministerial association, Citizen Corps, United Way, the remaining skeleton of a past long-term disaster recovery group, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs), a faith-based disaster response network, a state or local emergency management, and American Red Cross.



While participation of the religious community is vital to community recovery, assistance reaches families most efficiently and effectively when there is cooperation, collaboration, and coordination of the work among not only members of the religious community, but secular organizations and agencies as well. Local governmental and community human services agencies, now more than ever, are aware of the long-term recovery mission and are committed to bringing their own resources to the recovery. Together, religious and secular organizations in cooperation provide the greatest benefit to a disaster-affected community.

## RECOVERY PROGRAM NEEDS CHECKLIST

- Mission statement and plan for operations
- Office space that is accessible for those needing assistance
- Adequate space for work and privacy for interviews
- Office equipment: phones, computer, fax, desks, file cabinets, work tables
- Staff
- Cases
- Case management documentation, eligibility, and follow-up
- Referral system: directory of disaster agencies and their resources
- Grants and funding resources
- Program promotion and interpretation materials: brochures, flyers, communications via phone, mail, internet to community, donors, media
- Regular meetings of board or coordinating leaders
- Construction estimator and estimates
- Pre-construction case assessment and approval
- Volunteers for clean-up and small repair jobs; may be unskilled
- Skilled volunteers for major construction rebuilds or projects

This checklist is modified from a list developed by North Carolina Interfaith Disaster Response and printed in a manual for their network of long-term recovery organizations, "A Training Tool for use by the Local Interfaith in Disaster Response".