

Preparing for and Responding to Public Emergencies and Natural Disasters

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The Chinese character for disaster

has two parts

危

Danger

機

Opportunity

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I. Introduction

This handbook, the funding for which was provided by the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, was designed to help philanthropic foundations prepare for and respond to emergencies on all scales.

One can imagine a spectrum of crisis situations requiring responses. At one end is an emergency such as a person losing a job or an agency having a fire. At the other end of the scale is a disaster such as a flood, earthquake, riot, or hurricane (an event of low probability but potentially high impact).

Foundations have a unique role to play in responding to such situations because they have ready assets to use, they know a given community very well, and they are flexible and not politically governed.

In producing the handbook, the author traveled across the country and met with Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), United Way, Red Cross, and foundation personnel. The effort was to determine how these agencies have dealt with emergencies, mainly disasters, and to see what ideas they have to be more effective the next time.

This handbook tries to delineate a role for philanthropic foundations vis-a-vis the Red Cross, FEMA, and United Way. The Red Cross has a goal of being able to respond in two hours to an emergency/disaster. FEMA primarily contributes federal money for the rebuilding effort after a disaster, although the most recent word from FEMA is that it is involved in mitigation, preparation, response, and recovery regarding disasters.

Other governmental entities that respond to disasters include state and county Offices of Emergency Management, the Small Business Administration, and the General Services Administration.

It appears that foundations can have a role with emergencies, can plan ahead regarding disasters, and can play a significant part in rebuilding efforts after a destructive event. This handbook offers suggestions for foundations to consider.

“As funders we have a lot of leverage at the grass-roots level.”

Executive Director, Private Foundation

Private foundations have the ability to respond effectively to emergencies and disasters affecting individuals and human services organizations. They can even give to non-501(c)(3) programs and individuals by using a community foundation to make the grant if necessary. Foundations can also form relationships with each other so that when a disaster strikes, an immediate response mechanism is already in place.

II. Background

Natural occurrences such as hurricanes, floods, fires, and earthquakes have increasingly more devastating consequences due to urbanization. As people continue to move into areas heretofore undeveloped, the impact of these natural occurrences may be expected to continue to increase as well.

It is the involvement of volunteers and social organizations that saves people in a disaster. For example, in an earthquake a limited number of buildings account for most of the injuries. Most people are rescued in the first seventy-two hours after the earthquake, primarily by co-workers and family members. Thus, it is essential that foundations become prepared before a disaster occurs, so that they can respond quickly and be of greatest assistance to the community once a disaster has occurred.

III. Emergencies

Emergencies are at the beginning of the scale before disasters. As foundations prepare to respond to emergencies, they become better oriented to respond to disasters. Both individuals and agencies have emergencies. For an agency, an emergency is an unexpected event that threatens the continued existence of the entity, e.g. a fire or theft.

Immediate Grants Fund for Non-Profit Agencies

Some foundations have established funds that can provide immediate money to an agency facing an emergency such as a loss by theft of all of its computers. The agency director determines what it would cost to rent computers until the insurance policy pays out; this information is forwarded to the foundation and it makes funding or lending decisions. The whole process can take less than two hours and the agency is back in business.

- **Recommendation:** Consider creating an emergency grants fund to respond to emergencies at non-profit agencies.

Emergency Loan Fund for Non-Profit Agencies

The Northern California Grantmakers (NCG) since 1972 has sponsored the Emergency Loan Fund to deal with situations that put clients at risk, i.e. they will not receive the services they need. An example would be an agency not receiving a government check in time to cover contracted services and salaries. A no-interest loan would be made which is paid back when the government check arrives.

The Loan Fund is administered by a consortium of foundations under the NCG that meets regularly, pools its money, and has a full time staff.¹

- **Recommendation:** Consider pooling resources with other foundations to increase the resources available for responding to agency emergencies.

¹For further information on the Emergency Loan Fund call Alan Levinson, Northern California Grantmakers (415) 777-5761

Individuals' Emergencies

Some foundations give money to meet the emergency needs of individuals. Rather than requiring people to call the foundation directly, a foundation can give money to human service agencies on an "as needed" basis. This places the responsibility on the agencies, rather than the foundation, to verify the emergency, ascertain the person's need, and make the decision. This method also speeds the process.

Such a relationship strengthens the agency to meet the needs of the public it serves and makes good use of its expertise. In addition, such grants to individuals are usually small and demonstrate the effectiveness of limited funds given at the right time.²

- **Recommendation:** Find outstanding agencies that serve people in need and offer to fund Emergency Response Funds.

IV. Disasters

First Response

Immediately after a disaster occurs, foundation personnel need to be concerned first about their own safety and then that of the agencies they fund.

Foundations should be prepared for a minimum of seventy-two hours of self-sufficiency after the disaster. The foundation staff should have plans to operate away from the office when the situation makes the office inaccessible.

- **Recommendation:** Have a current staff and Board of Directors roster with home addresses and telephone numbers for each staff member and board member to keep at their homes.
- **Recommendation:** Store copies of computer disks containing foundation records away from the foundation.

²For further information on Emergency Funds see report by the Ford Foundation listed in the reference section.

- **Recommendation:** Delineate a chain of command in responding to a disaster, e.g. Executive Director, Board Chair, etc.
- **Recommendation:** Have a portable cellular telephone (one that fits in a briefcase, and not a car phone) available for use by the foundation executive and staff.
- **Recommendation:** Consider giving discretionary authority to the foundation executive to make immediate grants after a disaster.

The first four recommendations above apply equally to non-profit agencies. Foundation personnel should encourage compliance.

“Money isn’t the problem after a disaster. It pours in.”

Board Member, National Disaster Relief Agency

Money might not be the problem, but getting it to the right place at the right time is what disaster relief is all about.

Money is the primary tool of a foundation. It is the skill with which it is disbursed that proves the effectiveness of the foundation.

There are two dimensions in giving out money after a disaster: immediate relief and recovery/rebuilding. It is generally agreed that foundations can play their major role in the second or recovery phase.

Basics of Disaster Response

Red Cross

The Red Cross can respond in two hours with relief help in the form of food, clothing, and shelter. It can give direct financial grants to individuals who are verified disaster victims.

FEMA

FEMA's response time ranges from twenty-four hours to two weeks after a presidential declaration of an emergency. It provides financial assistance up to \$11,500 to individuals; it can give funds to non-profits providing essential government-type services. FEMA funds can be supplemented with state disaster money.

Foundations

Foundations may provide financial assistance to individuals and organizations. Each foundation's response time is dependent upon its internal rules for responding to disasters. Foundations can speed response time with prior agreements with non-profits to help them after a disaster. Community foundations can act as depositories for money from national foundations, individuals, and local government.

Types of Disaster-Related Grants: Immediate Relief, Intermediate Assistance, and Long-Term Recovery

The Red Cross is best prepared for immediate response. This includes provision of food, clothing, and shelter. Foundations can provide for a number of services through grants to food banks for distributing commodities, to shelters to increase day and night facilities, and to agencies to provide transportation of donated goods and building materials to the intended recipients. These funds are supplemented by FEMA and insurance.

Intermediate Assistance includes grants for arts, human services, and health groups to get stabilized. A specific example would be funds to establish a telephone hot line for referring victims to services.

Foundations can provide long term recovery grants in the form of funds for conferences on "Lessons Learned," for school districts to rebuild and develop prototype, full-service elementary schools; for transitional housing, for case management services, and for rebuilding and repairing homes and non-profit facilities. After disasters, often there is a "rebuild" organization formed.

"We don't need new processes to respond to a disaster. Our response should be the same as usual, only more of it."

Board Member, Community Foundation

The argument by this person is that foundations are most effective in responding to a disaster by funding for long term recovery vs. immediate relief grants.

The fact is that foundations are in a unique position to do both, i.e. survey non-profits immediately after a disaster to respond to their needs and assist with community and economic development over the long haul.

Situation After a Disaster

Examples of the situation after a disaster would include no power, limited communication, no street signs or street lights, torrential rains, traffic jams, no gas, no commercial transportation, massive loads of incoming goods which can not be used, no temporary lodging, no multi-lingual speakers, debris everywhere, downed power lines, damaged cars, fear of looting, and need for security of goods.

“I wish we could have turned off the spigot. Stuff came from all over the country and flooded our spaces and inhibited our ability to store vital items.”

Relief Worker, South Carolina

Two of the primary needs after a disaster are warehouse space and volunteers to load and unload trucks. Interestingly, much of the material donated is unusable because it is not sorted by item, size, or intended use.

Kinds of Services Needed after a Disaster³

1. Additional care for latchkey children
2. More pre-school care
3. Stress workshops at elementary schools
4. Emergency temporary shelter
5. Crisis line
6. Post-traumatic stress counseling
7. Student community clean-up team
8. Student food program
9. Volunteer youth workers
10. Paid youth work crews
11. Therapy for children with post-traumatic symptoms

³Adapted from a list compiled by the Community Foundation in Charleston, South Carolina after Hurricane Hugo.

12. Budget counseling for families with changed economic circumstances
13. Rebuilding and repairing homes that are not insured
14. Medicines, especially for elderly
15. Help with utility and rent payments
16. Food
17. Housing assistance (mass and individual shelter)
18. Direct assistance (credit vouchers)
19. Establish computer management system to track clients

Examples of Disaster Funding

\$75,000 to set up the Tornado Recovery Task Force consisting of a social worker, psychiatrist, and architect to link people with services, help them with their loss, and assist in the design of new homes.

October, 1979 Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

\$56,000 to complete an emergency medical network enabling ambulances to communicate with each other and with hospitals.

February, 1981 Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

\$140,000 for discretionary spending by recipient agencies in responding to Hurricane Andrew. No applications required; funds given immediately.

August, 1992 Jesse Ball du Pont Foundation

