



Strategy Brief

The **FINANCE PROJECT**

Managing in Emergencies Enhancing Collaboration for Human Services

By Christianne Lind

Introduction

The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is a poignant reminder of the essential role of human services in emergency situations. In the wake of the storm, which affected more than one million people located within approximately 90,000 square miles spanning Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, critical human service needs included food, water, emergency shelter, and temporary housing as well as counseling, foster care, health care, and mental health services. Yet responders and others on the ground struggled to get essential services to affected individuals and communities. News reports cited incidents of people stranded on their roofs, shelters without adequate supplies, and health service shortages among the sick and elderly. In the affected areas, infrastructure damage and the displacement of staff, caseworkers, and volunteers impaired disaster response and recovery efforts. All three hospitals in New Orleans suffered significant flooding, which made it extremely difficult to address critical health needs during and after the storm. Many special needs facilities, such as nursing homes, mental health institutions, and foster care group homes, had a hard time providing ongoing services, particularly when their staff, patients, and facilities had to be evacuated.

Providing human services in emergency situations is challenging, and it can frustrate even the most experienced and capable groups. Emergency situations give rise to numerous complex issues,

Human Service Needs in Emergency Situations

- Basic needs, such as food, clothing, and emergency shelter.
- Financial assistance.
- Health care.
- Counseling and mental health services.
- Specialized services for vulnerable individuals, such as the sick, disabled, or elderly and those without transportation.
- Family reunification services.
- Access to schools and child care programs.
- Longer-term needs, such as stable housing, employment assistance, and job training.

such as mobilizing resources, supplies, and personnel quickly; dealing with systems that are destroyed, damaged, or strained during the disaster; ensuring that essential services reach those in need; and coordinating the many agencies, providers, and volunteers involved in these efforts.

Although collaboration is always useful, the scale, scope, and urgency of needs make collaboration imperative in emergency situations. Disasters often transcend jurisdictional and institutional boundaries, and they frequently overwhelm the capacity of individual groups or organizations to respond. Assistance, whether from other governments, voluntary organizations, or individuals, can be chaotic and piecemeal if it is not well coordinated. Although not a panacea for poor planning and disorganized response efforts, collaboration can help leaders address the complex challenges inherent in emergency situations by:

- Anticipating supports and services that may be needed in a disaster situation;
- Enhancing capacity to assess and respond to changing circumstances;
- Increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of response and recovery efforts;
- Reducing duplication of efforts and addressing critical gaps;
- Ensuring that essential services reach everyone in need, including the most vulnerable segments of society; and
- Helping bridge short-term and longer-term supports and services.

Importantly, the need for enhanced collaboration was one of the key findings of the 9/11 Commission. Lee Hamilton, commission co-chair, recently remarked, “There are many areas of responsibility in dealing with a disaster or trying to prevent a disaster or trying to mitigate a disaster and you have to have effective coordination and

cooperation throughout the levels of government, not only in government but with the private sector, too. And getting that level of cooperation and coordination is very difficult to achieve but also [is] essential.”¹

Bearing in mind this important lesson, this brief summarizes strategies that policymakers, program developers, community leaders, human service providers, and others can use to enhance collaboration in emergency situations, so essential human services reach those in need.

Strategies to Enhance Collaboration in Emergency Situations

Policymakers, program developers, community leaders, human service providers, and others can use several strategies to enhance collaboration in emergency situations. They include

- Integrating management of emergency response and recovery efforts;
- Engaging in collaborative disaster planning and preparation;
- Developing partnerships to address unmet needs or vulnerabilities;
- Building in operating flexibility;
- Cross-training staff;
- Co-locating essential human services to make them more accessible to those in need; and
- Developing shared information and communication systems.

These strategies cover structural, operational, and infrastructure-based system interventions that can be used alone or in combination. The natural linkages among them suggest that combining or sequencing several strategies could have synergies. For example, an integrated

¹ Public Broadcasting System, The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, “Transcript of an Interview with Former 9/11 Commissioner Lee Hamilton,” September 14, 2005, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/fedagencies/july-dec05/hamilton_914.html.

management structure could help support collaborative planning and preparation efforts, or it could make it easier to co-locate essential human services. Similarly, shared information and communication systems could facilitate operating flexibility in emergency situations.

Integrate Management of Emergency Response and Recovery Efforts

Disasters frequently involve hundreds of high-stake, urgent decisions. During an emergency, there is little time to specify the ground rules for interagency cooperation. Fragmented management structures—unique to each agency or organization—are not well equipped to deal with massive mutual aid responses involving dozens of distinct agencies and organizations. Collaboration can be enhanced by developing an integrated management structure to coordinate emergency response and recovery efforts in the event of a major disaster.

An integrated management system can help establish clear decision-making authority to guide and coordinate response and recovery efforts. Integrated management is essential for overseeing the planning, operational, logistical, financial, and administrative components of a major disaster. These functions frequently include:

- Planning and evaluating emergency response and recovery efforts;
- Collecting and organizing real-time information about the disaster, affected areas, and infrastructure and human service needs;
- Managing staff and volunteers;
- Procuring essential disaster-related equipment, such as generators and communication devices;
- Determining how to get needed personnel and supplies to affected areas;
- Operating disaster-related facilities, such as command centers, emergency shelters, and distribution or staging areas; and

- Managing the administrative and financial aspects of the response.

At the national level, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for coordinating the federal response to major disasters. In this capacity, FEMA oversees more than 27 federal agencies and departments—including the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Labor—as well as national charitable organizations, such as the United Way, Salvation Army, and American Red Cross, that are involved in disaster response and recovery efforts.

Likewise, states and localities would benefit from integrated management functions to coordinate response and recovery efforts within their jurisdictions. State and local offices of homeland security and emergency management might be natural places to house these functions. This kind of structure can help formalize planning and preparation efforts for addressing emergencies. It can also help build partnerships and working relationships among first responders, public agencies with disaster-related responsibilities, and key human service providers.

State and local leaders should take into account these important considerations in developing an integrated management structure:

- What functions agencies and groups have authority over;
- Where decision-making authority resides;
- The roles and responsibilities of key staff members;
- The communication and information systems needed to coordinate disaster response and recovery efforts; and
- How to coordinate efforts with key partners.

Engage in Collaborative Disaster Planning and Preparation

Collaborative disaster planning and preparation can facilitate more effective response and recovery efforts by ensuring there is a shared understanding of human service needs and the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of various groups when disaster strikes. The impetus to engage in collaborative disaster planning and preparation can come from the top down or bottom up. Federal, state, and local policymakers and program administrators can enhance collaboration by developing mandates or setting clear expectations about participation in disaster planning and preparation processes. Human service providers and community-based organizations can also advocate for more inclusive processes by educating policymakers and program administrators about the need for and benefits of engaging others in disaster planning and preparation. These efforts could involve raising important questions and concerns about existing emergency response and recovery efforts as well as gathering basic information about anticipated needs.

Collaborative planning and preparation processes can take many forms. They can involve many stakeholders or a select number of stakeholders. Collaboration can also take on many forms, including soliciting input, creating joint planning structures, or developing an integrated plan.

However, the more inclusive the processes, the more informed disaster planning and preparation efforts will be. Sound disaster planning requires leaders to have a deep understanding of both the potential needs that may arise in an emergency situation as well as the response capabilities that can be brought to bear on the situation. Leaders also need to understand how to structure service delivery so services reach everyone in need, including the most vulnerable segments of society, and so there is coordination between short-term and longer-term assistance. Representatives from federal, state, and local governments; myriad public agencies and programs; and other service providers, including nonprofit, community-based, and faith-based organizations, can help leaders develop a more comprehensive and realistic plan for responding to disasters.

Potential Participants in Collaborative Disaster Planning and Preparation Efforts

Federal Government Agencies

- Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- Department of Homeland Security.
- Department of Labor.
- Department of Health and Human Services.
- Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Department of Agriculture.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

State and Local Government Agencies

- State and local agencies with jurisdiction over health, labor, housing, child welfare, human services, law enforcement, mental health, homeland security, and emergency management.

Private Organizations

- Hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, and health care providers.
- Food distributors and retailers.
- Facilities that could be used as emergency shelters.
- Transportation companies.

Nonprofit Organizations

- Organizations that provide human services, such as the Salvation Army, American Red Cross, and Second Harvest National Network of Food Banks.

Faith-Based Organizations

- Organizations that provide human services, such as Catholic Charities Disaster Response, Lutheran Disaster Response, Presbyterian Disaster Services, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, and local religious groups.

Community-Based Leaders and Organizations

- Social service providers.
- Those with expertise on special-needs populations or other vulnerable groups.
- Community-wide and neighborhood leaders.

Community Action Partnership's Community Land Security Program

The Community Action Partnership's Community Land Security (CLS) program aims to address the needs of low-income communities in emergency planning and response efforts. The program calls for a partnership among community leaders, first responders, and law enforcement personnel to coordinate community outreach and provide information on emergency response via local resource centers. Outreach efforts include one-on-one meetings with people who are ill, elderly, or disabled. Since 2002, the program has been introduced in more than 10 states, including Kentucky (Knox County); Maine (Rockland); Maryland (Frederick); Michigan (Monroe); Mississippi (Bolivar County); New Jersey (Middlesex County); Ohio (Fremont); Oklahoma (Hugo); Texas (Rio Grande City); and Virginia (Newport News).

The Monroe County [Michigan] Opportunity Program (MCOP), a community action agency in operation since 1965, provides services and referral sources for eligible residents of the county to reduce poverty, revitalize impoverished communities, and empower low-income families and individuals to become fully self-sufficient. Receipt of a CLS grant enabled MCOP to become a forerunner in emergency planning. MCOP designated a CLS coordinator responsible for organizing training sessions, facilitating presentations, participating in county and regional emergency planning committees, and coordinating information dissemination. The coordinator also acts as a liaison between the agency and the Red Cross, with whom MCOP formed a partnership to ensure information distributed during emergencies to targeted populations is accurate and specific.

Consequently, the organization was well positioned to provide assistance to families relocating to the area in the wake of Katrina. MCOP participated in local efforts to coordinate services to these families and worked closely with the community Emergency Management Division, the Red Cross, the local Commission on Aging, and the countywide Continuum of Care to organize and create a comprehensive plan for homebound and vulnerable seniors and the homeless population.

Contact Derrick Span or Lisa Holland, Community Action Partnership, 202.265.7546 or www.communityactionpartnership.com.

Engaging others in the planning process also helps build working relationships that later may be critical. In addition, it fosters a shared vision of emergency response efforts, which can significantly facilitate coordination and collaboration if and when disaster strikes.

Develop Partnerships to Address Unmet Needs or Vulnerabilities

Collaborative disaster planning and preparation processes can help reveal unmet needs and vulnerabilities in local preparedness. For example, local hospitals might not have the surge capacity needed to provide medical care or lifesaving drugs to large populations. Similarly, local governments may need help from other communities or states to deal with large-scale disasters.

Partnerships can help bring additional resources and capabilities to bear on local response and recovery efforts. Given that disasters can, and often do, overwhelm local capabilities, leaders can benefit from developing partnerships with other key groups—such as other states, localities, national organizations, and private companies—to provide additional support if needed. Human service providers and others can also initiate partnerships among themselves, other voluntary organizations, or local and state leaders to enhance their emergency response capabilities.

Leaders should take into account these considerations in selecting potential partners:

- **The nature of the unmet need or vulnerability.** In many cases, the selection of potential partners is driven by the nature of the

unmet need or vulnerability, because specific types of resources and expertise are required to enhance local response capabilities. For example, neighboring states and communities, which have the ability to lend or mobilize additional personnel, supplies, and equipment to affected areas, may be natural partners for local leaders that need diverse assistance. In other cases, the type of needed expertise or resources can be very specific. For example, local leaders might partner with medical institutions and pharmaceutical companies to address unmet health needs.

- **Experience with emergency situations.**

Groups that have prior experience with emergency situations are typically better equipped to quickly mobilize equipment, resources, and personnel after a disaster strikes. National nonprofit groups and disaster relief organizations, such as the Salvation Army, American Red Cross, Second Harvest National Network of Food Banks, Catholic Charities Disaster Response, Lutheran Disaster Response, Presbyterian Disaster Services, and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, have extensive experience providing

essential human services in emergency situations.

- **How to structure the partnership.** Leaders can use various mechanisms to help structure a partnership, define partners' roles and responsibilities, and ensure mutual accountability. The details of the partnership can be reflected in contracts, memoranda of understanding, joint planning documents, or mutual aid agreements. In thinking about how to structure a partnership, leaders need to take into account the nature of the partnership as well as the trade-offs and implications of different types of agreements. For example, memoranda of understanding and joint planning documents are not legally binding, so they might be more suitable for partnerships where there is a high degree of trust or mutual dependence. Legal requirements can also affect how the partnership is structured. For example, local and state governments might need legislative authorization to enter into partnerships with other public and private entities. Several have enacted mutual aid agreements to enable state and local leaders to request and receive disaster assistance from others.

Emergency Management Assistance Compact: State-to-State Partnership for Emergency Response

In 1992, when Hurricane Andrew devastated Florida, it became apparent that even with federal resources, states would need to call on one another in times of emergencies. As a result, the Southern Governors' Association coordinated with Virginia's Department of Emergency Services to develop a state-to-state mutual aid agreement; the Southern Regional Emergency Management Assistance Compact was adopted in 1993. In January 1995, the southern governors voted to open membership to any U.S. state or territory that wanted to join. The broadened agreement was called the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). Congress ratified EMAC in 1996, and it became Public Law 104-321.

EMAC provides a common form and structure to interstate mutual aid. Through EMAC, a disaster-impacted state has an established procedure to request and receive assistance from other member states. EMAC also resolves two key issues up front: reimbursement and liability. Under EMAC, states that receive assistance are legally responsible for reimbursing assisting states and are liable for out-of-state personnel.

In 2004, EMAC helped facilitate one of the largest sustained deployments to date of state-to-state mutual aid in response to Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. EMAC deployed more than 800 state and local personnel from 38 states—including one nonmember state, California—representing approximately \$15 million in personnel, equipment, and National Guard expenditures. For more information, refer to the EMAC website at www.emacweb.org.

California Statewide Mutual Aid Agreements: State and Local Partnership for Emergency Response

California has a statewide mutual aid system that aims to ensure jurisdictions can get adequate resources, facilities, and other support whenever their own resources are insufficient to cope with a given situation. Created in 1971 by the California Emergency Services Act, the statewide Master Mutual Aid Agreement—together with more specific agreements for fire and rescue, law enforcement, emergency managers, and medical examiners and coroners—facilitates the coordination and flow of mutual aid by establishing a structure and process for mobilizing intercity and intercounty assistance. Under these agreements, the state is divided into six mutual aid regions. Regional managers and their staff, together with designated state agency representatives, oversee the mutual aid regions and help coordinate and support local emergency operations in emergency situations. As part of this mutual aid system, the Governor's Office receives a constant flow of information from every geographic and organizational area of the state. Most cities and all 58 counties in California have adopted the Master Mutual Aid Agreement. In addition, the state has mutual aid agreements with Arizona, Nevada, and Oregon.

Build in Operating Flexibility

Disaster situations involve many unknowns, which can significantly impact response and recovery efforts. For example, human service needs may vary substantially, depending on the type of disaster (e.g., a volcano, hurricane, chemical spill, or terrorist attack) and the scale and scope of the event. In addition, disasters can impair responders' ability to mobilize personnel, resources, and equipment as planned. In some cases, disasters can also damage or destroy critical infrastructure, which can impair entire systems or services. Although sound disaster planning and preparation can create a solid foundation for addressing changing circumstances, it is likely some adaptation and improvisation will be needed.

For these reasons, leaders should build in the capacity to operate flexibly into their disaster planning and preparation efforts. As soon as a disaster strikes, it is essential leaders quickly determine how to adapt emergency plans and marshal needed resources to address the particular disaster.

State and local leaders can improve their ability to respond effectively to unplanned elements of emergencies by building in the capacity to:

- Rapidly assess emerging human service needs in the wake of a disaster;
- Adapt emergency response plans as needed; and

- Communicate plans to key partners and groups on the ground.

Cross-Train Staff

Organizational staff and volunteers are usually the frontline responders in emergency situations. Cross-training staff from multiple groups and agencies can help address gaps in expertise, improve understanding of roles and

The Waterborne Evacuation After September 11th: Adapting and Improvising

In the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, the United States Coast Guard reached out to the harbor community to help evacuate people from lower Manhattan. Many of the terrestrial transportation routes were cut off as a result of the attacks, and residents had few options for fleeing the area. Although there was no plan for a mass waterborne evacuation of the city, the Coast Guard quickly reached out to vessels in the area—including ferries, tugboats, cruise boats, and other private craft—for help. Together, they were able to execute the successful evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people from lower Manhattan. They also helped transport critical supplies, equipment, and personnel to Manhattan to respond to the disaster.

Source: Wachtendorf and Kendra 2005.

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responsibilities, overcome resistance to changes in service delivery approaches, and develop intervention strategies and a shared skill base. Some important elements of training include:

- Emergency response and recovery plans and preparations;
- How the plan will be adapted to changing circumstances;
- The key players and what capabilities and resources they bring; and
- How to assess and communicate urgent human service needs in the wake of a disaster.

Co-Locate Essential Human Services to Make Them More Accessible

Co-location involves stationing staff from various disaster response and human service organizations at the same location. Co-location can help make supports and services more accessible by centralizing them in one place. By expanding the information and resources immediately available to frontline staff, co-location can also facilitate referrals and teamwork among the many agencies and organizations that provide essential services to those in need.

Co-location can take numerous forms and provide a variety of services. One-stop centers co-locate multiple agencies and organizations to provide access to comprehensive services to those in need. Providing access to multiple informational services through the Internet is a web-based variation of co-location. Co-located services can be organized around a particular issue, such as disaster assistance, or specific populations, such as evacuees.

FEMA's Online Registration System: Online Application Access for Disaster Assistance

In October 2004, the Federal Emergency Management Agency launched an online registration system, <http://www.fema.gov/register.shtml>, where individuals affected by major disasters can apply for federal disaster-related assistance. As of July 2005, individuals can check the status of their claims 24 hours per day on this interactive site.

One-Stop Center for Evacuees in Waco, Texas

To provide essential services to evacuees from Hurricane Katrina, the city of Waco and Waco-McLennan County Emergency Management set up a "one-stop shop" at a local convention center. Evacuees were able to speak directly with representatives from several federal, state, and local agencies who worked to help them reestablish their lives. The one-stop shop included representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; the Social Security Administration; the Texas Health and Human Services' Office of Eligibility Services; the Texas Department of Public Safety; the Texas Department of Insurance; Texas Child Care Licensing; Adult Protective Services of the State of Texas; the Heart of Texas Council of Governments' Area Agency on Aging; McLennan County Welfare Department Indigent Health Care, Veterans Affairs; Waco Transit; Waco Housing Authority; Waco McLennan County Public Health District; Salvation Army; Caritas; American Red Cross; Foster Family; and HOT Workforce.

To educate the community about the services that would be available at the one-stop center, the city prepared an online flyer that was also distributed by community groups and set up a phone bank for calling local evacuees to inform them of the one-stop shop location and hours of operation. Registrations with local emergency management officials indicated that hundreds of evacuees visited the center and were successfully linked to services. For more information, contact Larry Holze, public information officer, at larryh@ci.waco.tx.us

Develop Shared Information and Communication Systems

Shared information and communication systems are essential to coordinate disaster response and recovery efforts. Groups on the ground need access to real-time information as a disaster unfolds so they can assess and prioritize needs, coordinate their efforts with others, and address unanticipated developments. One of the tragic lessons of 9/11 was that the failure to properly equip emergency responders with communication devices in New York City significantly undermined the efficacy of the first responders because they could not obtain accurate information about the disaster and recovery efforts.

Emergency response efforts can be aided by anticipating critical information needs in advance. Emergency responders and other groups active in disasters can benefit from shared up-to-date information about:

- Disaster alert systems and procedures;
- Potential evacuation routes;
- Disaster response and recovery plans;
- Emergency management staging sites;
- Emergency responders, human service providers, and other groups that may be called on to help with disaster relief efforts;
- Partnerships and mutual aid agreements;
- Specialized services needed for vulnerable populations;
- Temporary housing and shelter facilities; and
- Food distribution centers.

Although interoperable information and communication systems—where first responders and human service providers in the affected areas

talk to one another as well as their counterparts from other jurisdictions or states who are involved in disaster response efforts—may be ideal, developing them poses significant challenges. These challenges include the high costs of these systems; the categorical nature of federal funding streams that makes it difficult for agencies to pool funding; the large number of agencies and organizations that need to have access to these systems; and the confidentiality and privacy concerns that providers and clients express.

Short of full interoperability, experts recommend that groups can and should take steps to develop shared information and communication systems, such as creating linkages between existing information and communication systems and investing in standard off-the-shelf technology to enable personnel to communicate reliably and effectively in a crisis.² Examples of shared information and communication systems include:

- Public alerts and sirens;
- Computer electronic notifications;
- Wireless Internet access;
- Specialized phones located at staging areas that connect to a command center;
- Wireless devices, such as pagers, cell phones, satellite phones, and personal data assistants;
- Short-wave radios;
- Videoconferencing;
- Emergency hotlines for groups in the field to call in and obtain more information about the situation; and
- Disaster-specific websites or information public alerts and sirens;
- Disaster-specific websites or information systems.

² Hunt and Malamud, *A Better Communications System for Emergency Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, September 2005).

Joint Information Center and Crisis Communications Website

In Washington, the Pierce County Department of Emergency, cities, emergency response agencies, county school districts, and volunteer relief organizations have established a collaborative effort to coordinate and communicate critical information in the event of a disaster. These groups have established a joint information center and crisis communications website, which can be activated during times of emergency. These communication systems seek to improve information-sharing, enable citizens to participate in the reporting of disaster information, promote intergovernmental cooperation, and facilitate decisionmaking during a crisis.

Source: National Association of Counties 2001.

Special Needs Registration Program

In Iowa, the Linn County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) developed a special needs registration program to gather information about the needs and challenges of all persons with disabilities who live in their homes, not in a group home or residential care setting. The program was created to gather information about special-needs residents, prior to an emergency, and to help the county plan and prepare the resources necessary to provide timely assistance to this population. Because confidentiality laws prohibit EMA officials from obtaining this information from social service agencies, they must rely on voluntary registration to identify those who might need special assistance. EMA collected this information by phone and through mailed registration cards. Information about special needs individuals was entered into a special EMA geographic information system database.

Source: National Association of Counties 2001.

Conclusion

Collaboration is essential for mobilizing effective response and recovery efforts and for addressing the scale, scope, and urgency of human needs that commonly arise in the aftermath of major disasters. The need for enhanced collaboration is one of the key lessons learned from both 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. The strategies and examples highlighted in this brief can help leaders better prepare for and respond to future disasters. Although many of these strategies are not new, they take on new significance and added meaning in the context of emergency situations. Importantly, these strategies can and have been used in creative ways to improve coordination among first responders, human service providers, and affected communities, so essential services reach everyone in need, including the most vulnerable.

Resources on Collaboration and the Provision of Emergency Human Services

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