

Faith Communities & Long-Term Recovery



A strong, well-organized Long-Term Recovery Organization (LTRO), working in partnership with faith communities, is essential for coordinating resources needed by survivors and supporting recovery for the whole community. As a religious leader, you bring vital resources to the process: an intimate knowledge of your community’s evolving recovery needs, along with the hope, moral leadership, and emotional and spiritual care you provide.

LONG-TERM RECOVERY

Human, material, and financial resources flow (or trickle) into your community after a disaster strikes. Eventually these limited resources will decline as public awareness and media visibility diminishes. Recovery is not only about the restoration of structures, systems and services, although they are critical. A successful recovery is also about survivors being able to rebound from their losses, and sustain their physical, social, economic and spiritual well-being.

As the community recovers, a transitional period (3-6 months) will occur as the administration of recovery programs shifts from federal agencies and National VOAD (Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster) to the local community. During this transition, your local or state LTRO will coordinate local community needs by implementing disaster case management and other recovery initiatives to ensure that individuals within the community all are progressing towards sustainable recovery. An LTRO, composed of representatives from a variety of organizations, including disaster interfaiths, will coordinate support for survivors whose unmet needs may not fall neatly into “qualified” survivor populations served by government entitlements or other recovery organizations. *(For more information on stages of the disaster lifecycle see **NDIN Tip Sheet: The Disaster Lifecycle: Where Do Religious Leaders Fit In?**)*

ORGANIZING A LONG-TERM RECOVERY ORGANIZATION OR DISASTER INTERFAITH

A long-term recovery organization (LTRO), is a cooperative body that is made up of representatives from faith-based, non-profit, government, business and other organizations working within a community to assist individual survivors and impacted families as they recover from disaster. This process can take years.

LTROs are as varied in their structure as are the communities in which they work. The personality and operation of each group are unique and reflect local needs, available resources, cultural and religious diversity, leadership style, and community support. No matter how a group is structured or what it calls itself—unmet needs roundtable, disaster interfaith, recovery committee, partnership, council, etc.—the goal is the same: to match resources with unmet needs in order to ensure that even the most vulnerable in the community achieve sustainable recovery. As a religious leader in a disaster impacted community, you can play an integral role in the long-term recovery of a community. Your participation in any LTRO is critical.

COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY LTRO

- Clear statement of the organization’s mission
- Effective organizational structure
- Fiscal transparency & annual balanced budget
- Adequate financial controls and program evaluation process
- Board & committees with broad community representation
- Established policies as to who you will help and by what means (often including a needs assessment process)
- Case management process
- Construction management process
- Volunteer management process
- Donations management process
- Unmet needs program
- Strategic plan for 3-5 years of recovery
- Spiritual care system
- Mitigation and preparedness plan for future disasters

In preparing for or responding to disasters in your community, it will be helpful to identify agencies and organizations that commonly provide disaster services. These organizations can become partners in the planning and recovery process, and may be able to assist in the formation of your LTRO.

Partner agencies may include local and/or state emergency management (EM), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), members of the local and/or state Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), and members of National VOAD (refer to www.nvoad.org).

Additional stakeholders may include other members of local government, civic organizations, social service agencies, local houses of worship, community foundations, community health groups, mental health agencies, information and referral services, and the private sector.

WHAT ARE “UNMET NEEDS”?

Individuals within a community vary in their ability to recover from a disaster and the resources available to them for recovery. Most will be eligible for federal or state entitlement assistance provided as part of the disaster recovery process. However, others may have unusual circumstances or needs that are not typically addressed. Because members of the LTRO are familiar with the community and represent a variety of agencies and organizations, they should form an Unmet Needs Committee to work with case managers and funders to identify the existing and emerging unmet needs of individual survivors and impacted families within any community. An “unmet needs” program will provide cash assistance, re-build coordination, and referrals to assist survivors and their case managers in meeting these needs. Additionally, the LTRO can ensure that the needs of those individuals and groups within the community who are slower to recover are not overlooked in either the short or long term.

PARTNER AGENCIES

The LTRO will most likely have many stakeholders, partner agencies and funders. As an individual stakeholder or the leader of a disaster interfaith or faith-based recovery agency, you can aid the recovery process in these ways:

- Bring together stakeholders to share information concerning the disaster and plans for recovery.
- Identify disaster-related unmet needs and coordinate resources to assist in recovery.
- Mentor and/or provide ongoing training throughout the recovery process.
- Provide financial and other resources that will be needed in the recovery.
- Provide the venue for meetings and/or office space.

INVOLVEMENT OF HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

There are many ways that houses of worship and religious leaders can get involved or assist an LTRO

- If your community is particularly involved in the disaster relief or response processes, you may want to ask for a seat on the board of the LTRO or on an administrative, advocacy, or program committee of the LTRO.
- Your house of worship, or some its volunteers, may get directly involved in the long-term recovery. Examples of this include providing spiritual care, offering direct services, or volunteering to support feeding, housing or other recovery programs.
- Religious leaders are a natural link between individuals in the community and the leaders of the LTRO. You may have individuals in your congregation who are willing to volunteer or commit their time and services to the long-term recovery needs of the community. The services or skills that are of use include, but are not limited to; rebuilding, debris and mud removal, legal and accounting services, or other services that provide extended medical care needed by injured survivors.
- Religious leaders often have better knowledge of unmet needs in the community because they deal directly with individuals, especially those who are not necessarily willing to come forward and ask for help.
- It is vital to any long-term recovery program that faith communities engage with meeting unmet needs—faith communities are the primary or sole source of cash assistance and referral not restricted by government policies or social barriers.

EMOTIONAL & SPIRITUAL CARE FOR LONG-TERM RECOVERY

In addition to participating in a LTRO, leaders of faith communities continue to play a role in meeting the long-term emotional and spiritual needs of their community.

Many survivors will experience emotional and spiritual stress reactions during or after a disaster. The need is ongoing, as people learn to adjust to changes in their lives post-disaster. (See **NDIN Tip Sheet “Disaster Spiritual Care” and “Self Care”** to learn more about the types of needs religious leaders can address.) Some common spiritual stress reactions include:

- Reconsidering core tenets of religious beliefs
- Questioning justice and meaning
- Feeling far from previously held beliefs
- Suddenly turning away from or to God
- Losing a sense of meaning and purpose
- Feeling isolated from God and one’s religious community
- Being angry at God, the divine or spiritual leaders
- Feeling disconnected from familiar religious practices (prayer, ritual acts, sacred texts)

The need for spiritual care may be especially acute around the anniversary of the disaster or during other times when the event is memorialized or commemorated. Holidays also may evoke emotions or reactions that stress people on a spiritual level. As a religious leader, your continued involvement in helping plan events that are sensitive to the community’s spiritual needs, as well as addressing the spiritual needs of survivors, will aid in restoring hope and healing to those impacted by the disaster.

OTHER RESOURCES

- **Church World Service—Community Arise Curriculum (Basic Disaster Ministry): Long-Term Recovery—**
<http://www.communityarise.com>
- **Coordinated Assistance Network:** <http://www.can.org/>
- **Federal Disaster Assistance:** <http://www.disasterassistance.gov>
- **FEMA—National Disaster Recovery Framework:** <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/recoveryframework/ndrf.pdf>
- **National VOAD—Long-Term Recovery Manual:**
http://www.nvoad.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=139