

Creating an Engagement Strategy & Plan

LEADER is a six-step process for successfully engaging faith communities.

LEADER: LEARN — EDUCATE — ASSESS — DETERMINE — ENGAGE — REVIEW



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STEP 1. LEARN THE DISASTER'S IMPACT

A disaster may affect one or more communities in several geographical areas. Disasters often disproportionately impact “at risk” or vulnerable populations—including groups of a particular demographic, faith tradition, geographical area, et cetera.

Where to Start

1. Review preliminary damage assessments and geographic info systems (GIS) maps from FEMA, state/local emergency mgmt, or NVOAD members. [Tool: FEMA GeoPlatform](#)

Key Points

- ♦ Try to learn the basics around: what areas were impacted, how they were affected, and what reported needs are emerging.

STEP 2. EDUCATE YOURSELF ON LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITIES

Each disaster may affect a number of different faith communities; each with its own history, challenges, goals, capabilities, and resources. Understanding who you want to reach, their role, and what capabilities and resources they may have will help you design an appropriate plan. Religious hierarchies or interfaith coalitions/networks can serve as force amplifiers for spreading a message much more quickly, effectively, and appropriately than knocking on doors of individual houses of worship.

Where to Start

1. Build a databank starting at the city or county level.
Tools: [US Census Bureau Religious Congregations and Membership Study](#)
2. After reviewing data, ask yourself: What faith communities are in the affected area, who are the key religious leaders/communicators, what networks, associations, & other force multipliers exist, what other agencies work with these communities, what connections to national affiliates exist, and which groups are not included or likely to be missed?
Tools: [FEMA Faith Community Engagement Tip Sheets](#)
[NDIN Disaster Interfaith Directory](#)
[NVOAD's State VOAD Directory](#)
Also check with Voluntary Agency Liaisons
3. Indicate possible logistical planning items related to local faith communities (e.g. dietary needs, language support).
4. Ask Regional VAL for their assistance identifying key groups and existing partnerships such as VOADs and LTROs.

Key Points

- ♦ More survivors can be reached through force amplifiers than by knocking on individual doors alone.
- ♦ Plan to engage religious leaders through existing networks. Consider ministerial alliances, religious federations, dioceses or judicatories, disaster interfaith/interreligious/multifaith coalitions / networks.
- ♦ Plan to engage survivors through congregations or religious leaders as opposed to convening new groups.
- ♦ Plan to intentionally include groups of all faith traditions.
- ♦ Plan to include lay religious leaders/boards in addition to ordained leaders as they often have ultimate control over use of congregational resources and relationships.
- ♦ Every location is unique. Your current operational area may be structured very differently than in prior deployments.
- ♦ Share your data on local faith communities and work collaboratively with local congregations to update it.

STEP 3. ASSESS YOUR RELIGIOUS LITERACY & COMPETENCY

In addition to being familiar with government and non-government resources, among other skills, it is critical to be aware of ones own level of religious literacy and competency.

Where to Start

1. Take a self-assessment. **Tool:** [FEMA Engaging Faith Communities Tip Sheet “Resources and Tools”](#)
2. Ask yourself: Which faith communities do you feel most competent working with and for which do you need additional training or knowledge? What competencies and literacy knowledge can your team members contribute?

Key Points

- ♦ Think about language abilities and familiarity with local religious customs, rituals, and practices.
- ♦ What best practices can you bring to faith communities?
- ♦ What can you do to help coordinate and enable faith communities to work effectively?

STEP 4. DETERMINE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Determining who, what, when, where, how, and why you will engage is a critical step prior to first meetings with religious leaders.

Where to Start

1. Create a formal process plan which should include: who, what, when, where, why, and how. [Tool: NDIN/USC Field Guide—Working with U.S. Faith Communities](#)
2. WHO: Start with mega force multipliers.
3. WHAT: Work with existing faith communities and organizations that coordinate activities.
4. WHAT: Research prior ways that faith communities have helped. [Tool: NDIN Tip Sheets—Faith Community Leaders](#) and [USC Asset Mapping & Risk Comm. Survey](#)
5. WHAT: Check core capabilities of local religious groups and help connect them to their NVOAD affiliates if needed. [Tool: FEMA Tip Sheets for Engaging Religious Leaders](#)
6. WHEN/WHERE: Use religious holiday calendars to avoid religious holidays and choose neutral meeting spaces.
7. HOW: Ensure diversity in representation and process.
8. Share information and learnings.

Key Points

- ◆ Start with mega force multipliers.
- ◆ Plan to work with existing faith-based groups that convene and coordinate activities in the area.
- ◆ Use gov't neutrality to your advantage to overcome any local tensions and encourage inclusion of all groups.
- ◆ Develop clearly defined goals and objectives that have real value for faith communities.
- ◆ Faith communities have specific needs, priorities, skills, and resources: help channel these where needed.
- ◆ Think about customizing your approach according to the needs of each group (would in-person announcements be more effective than a newsletter blurb, or vice-versa?)
- ◆ Any planned requests for help should be backed-up with ideas for funding or resources to fulfill request.
- ◆ Think about how gov't and faith communities' roles can complement each other in the IA Sequence of Delivery.

STEP 5. ENGAGE RELIGIOUS LEADERS & COMMUNITIES

Carrying out the plan in a religiously literate and competent way is equally important as the logistics of the plan itself. Active listening and empowering religious leaders to lead goal-setting discussions will improve buy-in on partnership agreements.

Where to Start

1. Learn cultural “Dos and Don'ts” for greeting, titles for addressing leaders, as well as physical interaction. [Tools: FEMA Tip Sheets for Engaging Religious Leaders, NDIN/USC Religious Literacy Primer](#)
2. Begin carrying out engagement plan with religious leaders. Ask about any disaster-related needs, core capabilities, and social programs they have or had.
3. Let faith community representatives lead the visioning process.
4. Communicate capabilities and remaining basic human needs or other emerging needs back to JFO leadership/Operations.
5. Support survivors by collaborating with religious leaders on language translation and/or explaining answers to questions on available assistance.
6. In subsequent meetings return with requested deliverables or connect to NVOAD through FEMA VAL.

Key Points

- ◆ LISTEN!: Faith communities are often closest to the ground level after a disaster and have the most up-to-date information on post disaster needs and resources.
- ◆ ASK QUESTIONS and use active listening if you are unsure of something pertaining to a specific religious tradition.
- ◆ Consider attending services and events to build goodwill.
- ◆ Convey respect by dressing appropriately and using common courtesies.
- ◆ Develop a network of community guides/cultural brokers to give credibility to your message and assist in disseminating it.
- ◆ Lead from behind: Let your guides or religious leaders do the talking for you when appropriate.
- ◆ Allow faith groups to define their own leadership and who should represent them.
- ◆ Know when to convene and when to “be convened” – don't form new groups unless they will be self-sustaining and have funding after your deployment.

STEP 6. REVIEW AND CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE PLAN

Adjusting the plan as new information arises is essential to improving its efficacy. Incorporate new contacts as they are made.

Where to Start

1. Report community resources in the appropriate reporting mechanisms as new resources found.
2. Update your plan from Step 4 as new capabilities, contacts, and information are found in the field.

Key Points

- ◆ Maintain ongoing information flow with faith communities that you interact with.
- ◆ Participate in any ongoing regularly scheduled VOAD/ disaster interfaith/religious leader phone calls/meetings.