

Immediate Response Considerations and Checklist for Terrorist, Man-made or Natural Disaster Relief Funds: Part 3 of 3

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Summary

Bryan Clontz wraps up his three part series on disaster relief by offering charities steps to enable them to respond more quickly and capably whenever tragedy strikes.

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Introduction

For a variety of reasons, disasters in the United States and around the world will continue to grow in frequency and severity. Population growth will increase density, making natural disasters more costly in terms of casualties. It also will mean increased development. That will mean weather and geologic phenomena that used to center on wilderness areas now impact cities. The effects of climate change on weather cannot be completely predicted, but there is little doubt that they will be severe. Further, international and domestic terrorism and mass-casualty events are becoming daily fixtures in the nation's newspapers.



In response, Americans' charitable donations have grown over each of the last four years. In 2013, individuals contributed more than \$240 billion (Giving Institute, 2014). To meet the massive needs these disasters create, large established charities such as the American Red Cross, United Way, and Doctors Without Borders have redoubled their investments in technologies to make donations easier and relief delivery more efficient. In addition, well-meaning new charities spring up whenever disaster strikes around the globe. However, many of these new ventures do not have the leadership, infrastructure, staff, or know-how to effect meaningful change in the lives of disaster victims and survivors.

This paper intends to offer a step-by-step guide for charities to follow and make their next disaster response more effective. This guide will walk charities through the steps from preparation before the next hurricane, earthquake, or bombing through donation solicitation and collection to relief distribution, recovery efforts and post-disaster analysis. We will accomplish this by reviewing the lessons learned from previous catastrophes and charitable responses. Some efforts were tremendously effective, working to significantly lessen the horrors victims and communities experienced. Other response efforts experienced weak communications, poor victim relations, and questionable transparency in collections and disbursal. These mishaps created bad publicity and added to victims' misery.

The idea, of course, is to adopt the successful policies, while avoiding and finding alternatives to the failures. This paper also will look at the advent of social media, 24-hour video communications, and other advances that may help or hinder charitable disaster-relief efforts.

Over the last decade, populous and population-dense countries such as China, the United States, Indonesia, the Philippines, and India, have experienced the most disasters (Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, 2013). However, 88 percent of the fatalities caused by disasters were in low- or middle-income countries, where scarce resources and outdated or damaged infrastructure can delay rescue efforts.

Thesis

"Helping those struck by disaster involves more than knowing what to do; one also must know when and where to act, and with whom. Each disaster is unique. But generally, disaster response unfolds with a fairly predictable sequence of events" (Jessie Ball DuPont Fund, 2012). While charities deal with multiple variables throughout their disaster responses, specific considerations take precedence during different phases of the effort - Readiness Rescue, Relief, Recovery, and Review (North Carolina, 2013). Below, we discuss the questions charities should ask, the steps they should take, the possibilities they should consider during each step in the process. These questions help to accomplish a hierarchy of goals to which all charity disaster relief efforts should aspire:

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- To save lives, relieve suffering, and provide for the immediate and long-term needs of disaster victims
- To sustain donor compassion and engagement
- To ensure donated funds are directed competently and distributed fairly to their intended beneficiaries
- To allocate scarce human, financial, and material resources efficiently
- To eventually enhance recipient self-sufficiency and sustainability
- To improve performance and be better prepared for the next disaster relief effort through analysis and feedback (adapted from Raqim Foundation, 2012)

To achieve these purposes, charities must have operating plans in place. They must mobilize the materials and manpower in the manner that their operations manual calls for. At the same time, they must remain flexible enough to deviate from the written plan when circumstances change. When disaster responses fail, generally they “are not failures of the individual. More often, they are systems problems...organizational systems...procedures, management structures, and designation of responsibilities” (Auf der Heide, 1989).

Readiness

It is impossible to plan for every disaster contingency. Even municipalities and federal agencies that have expansive resources and deal with emergencies on a daily basis cannot foresee all the actions required during the next disaster. This is because disasters present challenges that make them much more than large-scale emergencies.

“The difference is more than just one of magnitude. Disasters generally cannot be adequately managed merely by mobilizing more personnel and material. Disasters may cross jurisdictional boundaries, create the need to undertake unfamiliar tasks, change the structure of responding organizations, result in the creation of new organizations, trigger the mobilization of participants that do not ordinarily respond to local emergency incidents, and disable the routine equipment and facilities for emergency response” (Auf der Heide, 1989).

“Disasters tend to happen quickly and with overwhelming force. The same holds true for fundraising in the aftermath of a disaster. The more planning you do in advance of the disaster, the better equipped you will be to handle the outpouring of support that immediately follows such devastation” (Miller, et al., 1999).

Only by developing a comprehensive response plan can charitable organizations hope to efficiently provide relief. Of course, the plan cannot aspire to cover all potential situations, victim needs and on-the-fly decisions. Nonetheless, charities can, with reasonable confidence, anticipate many of the roles they may be called upon to play. This is especially true for those that are set up to assist certain groups (emergency responders, employees of a certain company), or those living in geographic areas (flood plains, Tornado Alley, fault lines) that are more than usually susceptible to man-made or natural disasters (Jessie Ball DuPont Fund, 2012).

In times of disaster, the ability for charities to mobilize immediately could make the difference between mitigating a tragedy and compounding it. There will be little time for the charities to discuss strategy or debate their specific roles. Fortunately, the Readiness phase offers the luxury of time for these conversations.

The first step in establishing a charitable disaster relief fund is identifying the organization’s mission and assigning key leadership roles. A clear and narrowly defined mission statement will keep your charity endeavor focused during a catastrophe. It also will bring to light many questions that must be answered during the Readiness phase: What materials and skills do we need to accomplish our mission? Who are likely financial supporters, given our specific aims? How should we reach out to them? Only after answering these questions can you begin making operations decisions. (Miller, et al., 1999).

Mission definition should lead organizers to consider the personnel they require to lead and execute their goals. In addition, charities require outside professionals. Now is the time to engage a bank capable of receiving and disbursing large sums of money very quickly. An attorney can assist in setting up the charity, so that its donors and beneficiaries receive all the tax benefits to which they are entitled. Decide during the Readiness phase whether you will need public relations professionals, web developers, direct mail campaign writers, or other outside consultants, or whether your team can handle these tasks in-house. Clearly define everyone’s role. Expressly delineate how executive leaders will exert authority, and over what functions.

Your written mission plan also should include methods and processes for ensuring your charity uses the best practices identified below - transparency, open communication, responsiveness, etc.

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Donations are a charity's lifeblood, and the ability to collect contributions efficiently and easily from donors will go a long way toward determining how effective your effort can be. Internet and mobile-device applications may be the easiest methods for garnering funds. But disasters often damage communications infrastructure, so "a variety of fundraising methods - online, text-to-give, giving kiosks or traditional methods such as donations by check - [i]s critical to ensuring donors have a donation channel regardless of circumstance" (Baylis, 2013).

Rescue

The Rescue phase is the time between the advent of disaster, and the arrival of outside aid. During this phase police, fire, and emergency medical personnel remove the dead, evacuate the injured, and administer medical assistance to the critically wounded. They also work to stabilize the disaster area, extinguishing fires, establishing a police presence to prevent looting and violence, and securing potential hazards such as unstable buildings and deteriorating roads.

While charities will not have access to victims during this phase, they can begin to mobilize several critical components of their relief efforts.

Todd Baylis, CEO of Qgiv, a donation-processing company, advises that "while pushing out relief messaging mid-event is not usually advisable, donations or volunteers should be requested as soon as there is a need to fill." As soon as it becomes apparent that victims will have needs that the charitable organization can fill, the call for donations and volunteers should commence. Common early-stage needs might include shelter, food, water, and medical supplies. Relief agencies should avoid accepting aid too early in the process, as this might create warehousing, transportation, distribution, and other logistical headaches. The timing, Baylis notes, is subjective. It is dependent on the type and severity of the disaster, the location, and the type and amount of aid readily at hand from other sources (Baylis, 2013).

If you are establishing a new fund in the wake of a disaster, first determine your organization's mission. To maximize your chances of success, keep it as narrow as possible, and consider all strategies, collections, and disbursements in light of your mission statement. Donors, recipients, leaders, staff, the media, and the public all must understand the mission. This will lead to everyone pulling in the same direction to achieve the goal. The mission statement will define what you want to accomplish, how you will get it done, who you will help, what you will provide, how you will get it, and how you will distribute it.

Relief

Once the immediate danger of additional threats is abated, swift implementation of the disaster plan becomes crucial. "Disaster victims need help immediately. The faster resources are made available, the sooner victims can put their lives back together. There is a small window when the public's attention and generosity are focused on the disaster and its victims. In most cases, news stories and video footage tell the horrific story of a disaster's aftermath for only a few days" (Miller et al., 1999). Make your charity known while potential donors are engaged by media coverage of the disaster. Trumpet your mission; tell them how they can help; and make the appeal simply, often, and through as many outlets as possible.

Tailoring the message and the medium to the target audience will bear heavily on the project's positive impact. Charities seeking contributions from younger people, for example, will find a larger audience by posting their messages on social media rather than through interviews with public radio stations. That means crafting messages of 140 characters for tweets. "These communication media mandate that messages are crafted with brevity and immediacy, limiting the construction of message appeals. Senders must, therefore, pay extra attention to message characteristics that will successfully influence the receiver" (Schlimbach, 2013).

During this phase, charities put their plans into action. If your mission is to raise money for the Red Cross, for example, your task will center on soliciting donations, collecting money, and publicizing the victims' plight and their need for assistance. If, on the other hand, your niche is to provide short-term housing for earthquake victims, you may be concerned with purchasing tents, trailers, or prefabricated structures, along with beds, linens, and blankets. This will entail communicating with the vendors you identified in the readiness phase. You will place orders from suppliers, mobilize delivery trucks, dispatch volunteers to oversee construction, set-up, registration of victim / occupants, and myriad other tasks.

Everything will not proceed as planned. Charities' leaders and staff must be able to think on their feet. Communications, transportation, and supply chains are susceptible to breakdown in times of disaster. Successful charities will have contingency plans, of course, but even these cannot cover every eventuality. Relief organizations will be required to adapt to shortages of material, money, and

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personnel. And you must communicate these adaptations to all stakeholders, especially if these adaptations require changes in how contributions will be distributed or who will receive assistance.

“Charities soliciting from the general public need to meet two conflicting challenges. Their appeals should be specific enough to tell the potential donor how the funds will be used, but broad enough to permit flexibility to respond to needs as they become known” (Ford, 2003).

Recovery

Eventually the relief effort will gain momentum. Victims will no longer be in immediate danger, and the pressing needs turn toward the logistics of purchasing, scheduling, and distribution of aid. Now is the time to set in motion plans for recovery – assessing the damage the disaster has caused in terms of human, economic, and infrastructure costs.

Charities focusing on this phase can be instrumental by helping victims make car, rent, or mortgage payments, repair their homes and businesses, pay for long-term medical expenses, and “assist[] in rebuilding their structures and lives [and] adjusting to the “new normal” they are faced with (North Carolina, 2013).

As in the relief phase, recovery assistance requires forethought and a blueprint. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist acts in New York, Washington, D.C., and rural Pennsylvania, “[t]he long-term recovery process was aided by the fact that some philanthropic organizations reserved funds for later use to meet individual, family, and community needs whose exact dimensions were not immediately apparent in the chaotic weeks following 9/11” (Ford, 2003). Confusion and misinformation would have reigned had those charities not earmarked funds specifically for the recovery phase. Perhaps more importantly, these organizations would have fomented resentment among donors and victims had they not effectively communicated that some monies would be held in reserve for exactly these purposes. Indeed, in the wake of many disasters charities often come under fire for not immediately distributing collected funds to victims. In fact, by withholding some money, they may well be acting in strict accordance with their mandates and missions, but their failure to communicate these motives have resulted in bad publicity and dissension.

Further, “people do not come forward immediately to seek grief or post traumatic stress syndrome counseling, and it was therefore important that funds be reserved for this....[P]hilanthropies should move slowly and deliberately to plan their responses, and set aside funds to provide for needs that [are] not being met by FEMA and other ‘first responders’ such as the American Red Cross and Salvation Army” (Ford, 2003).

Review

“No one tragedy is identical to any other, but all disasters present opportunities for funders to be more thoughtful, cooperative and strategic in their work” (DuPont, 2012). In the aftermath of disasters and organizations’ responses to them, several lessons are likely to emerge that can serve as a roadmap for future responses. By comparing and contrasting the types of funds involved, charities can identify best practices and pitfalls they should avoid in their future efforts. By understanding the successes and failures of recent disaster fundraising campaigns, charities may absorb better ways to plan for, react to, and thereby mitigate the economic and humanitarian devastation of the next natural disaster. By developing a set of best practices in fundraising, marketing, strategy, and procurement, charities can improve their efficiency and effectiveness. These improvements will bring more relief to more people in a timelier manner the next time disaster strikes.

Advances in communications and transportation, the increasing use of social media, and a continuous news cycle are hallmarks of modern society. Accordingly, disaster response activities will be under mounting scrutiny to make faster, bigger, and more accountable responses to disasters.

Conclusions

Charities must be prepared to deliver immediate relief to disaster victims. However, government agencies and large, integrated, experienced organizations will meet many of those needs. In addition, being more prepared, having more comprehensive planning, and being better-equipped means new and smaller charities will be to respond to specific needs. Therefore, the 50-point plan below concentrates on two steps: First, Readiness - anticipating and preparing action plans - for potential disaster. Second, it focuses on Review - compiling knowledge, experience, and best practices, and implementing the lessons from success and failures of your own and other responses to catastrophe.

“[The Relief] stage ends quickly. To help individuals and communities raise the capital they will need to recover and rebuild, we must be communicators of accurate information, for individuals, for the media, for mayors, church and civic leaders” (DuPont, 2012).

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Communications is one of the most crucial elements of a successful campaign. “The donors and the public need to know how the money is being allocated. Any ambiguity about how the money is spent will be viewed with great skepticism by the media and public. It means that the people working on the fund understand the rules, guidelines and deadlines for the fund; that relief fund recipients know what the fund can and cannot do for them; and the donors know where and how their contributions are being used” (Miller, et al., 1999)

Charities must craft messages to appeal to each target market. Effective external communications framing will consider the organization’s goals and mission, and the audience’s demographic and economic characteristics. Charities should use these considerations in choosing the message, the medium used to deliver it, and the timing of the presentation to motivate donors (Timmerman, 2003.)

Transparency and Accountability go hand-in-hand with communication. It is perfectly acceptable to withhold a portion of donations to be invested later in community development or long-term victim needs, so long as donors understand the policy, and can easily designate or restrict their contribution to help victims of specific events (Charities Bureau, 2013). Accountability extends to distributing funds, as well as collecting them. Establish and stick to criteria for determining which individuals or agencies will receive the aid you collect. This policy should include a description of the aid community, how much each recipient is eligible for, how the funds can be used, and how much and in what time frame the money will be distributed (Connecticut Attorney General).

Nimbleness and Adaptability will be fostered by strong communication and transparency. This allows charities to alter their contributions (within the parameters established by their missions) and address problems in the Readiness and early Relief phases. Charity “appeals should be specific enough to tell the potential donor how the funds will be used, but broad enough to permit flexibility to respond to needs as they become known” (Ford, 2003).



Public Input can direct these changes in allocations and charities’ emphasis. One Fund Boston, the charity established to aid victims of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, received praise for its openness to input from victims, the public, and other stakeholders. The Fund solicited input on everything from the name of the fund, to its disbursal formula and timeline (Boston University, 2014).

Strong Leadership that subordinates ego and publicity to victim assistance enables charities to accept public input and shift resources to where they will be most effective. “Emergency managers have to innovate, adapt, and improvise because plans, regardless of how well done, seldom fit circumstances” (Waugh and Streib, 2006).

50-Point Disaster-Response Plan for Charities	
	READINESS PHASE
1	Define your mission and procedures: Who will you aid? How will you help them? From whom will you receive funding and supplies? How will you solicit and collect donations?
2	Assign leaders in your organization, and clearly define their roles, responsibilities, duties, and authority.
3	Retain professional service providers such as fiscal agents, attorneys, and accountants.
4	Create redundant systems for storing and retrieving planning and operations documents (hard copy, electronic, cloud, off-site).
5	Maintain up-to-date records of contact information for employees and volunteers.
6	Make contingency plans in case of communications, information systems, or transportation breakdown.
7	Local charities should analyze pre-existing data regarding demographics, on-site disaster aid and

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	infrastructure, and government action plans for assistance in identifying potential unmet needs.
8	Local charities should participate in community emergency drills to ensure rapid response, and uncover any "holes" in your plan.
9	If you will be providing on-site aid, identify several locations that possibly can be used as command and / or distribution centers.
10	Compile a list of potential donors, foundations, businesses, and individuals.
11	Create multiple ways to solicit and receive donations that can be implemented immediately when needed. Pay particular attention to online and social media platforms.
12	Identify key vendors and suppliers. If possible, negotiate in advance the costs and delivery deadlines. Have back-up vendors in place in case of greater need or primary vendor failure.
13	Build your website and establish a public / media relations lead.
14	Network, plan, and coordinate with other charities serving your area. By knowing the purpose of other organizations, you may find unmet needs that your charity possesses the resources to fill.
15	If your organization will raise money for, or make grants to, other charities, investigate which on allowed earmarked "directed" gifts. Ensure all potential intermediaries' missions align with yours.
16	Local charities should discuss with lawmakers the possibility of waiving or fast-tracking regulation such as bidder's preference, building plans checks, inspections, tax-exempt status, etc. in times or disaster.
RESCUE PHASE	
17	The actual rescue operations will be carried out by government agencies and first responders in and around the disaster area. However, by monitoring their activities, analyzing media reports and communications (especially on social media) from victims, charities may glean information that will help them implement and / or alter their relief plans for a fast start during that phase.
18	Charities established in response to a specific disaster outside their local area can use this limited time to analyze victim demographics, government capabilities and restrictions, and resources available "on the ground." Use this information to organize your relief response and augment the aid you will provide.
19	Inform your supporters of the emergency, and update them on what is needed.
20	Establish a timeline for donations and distribution of funds. How long will you solicit donations for the current disaster? How long will you continue to accept funds? What is the deadline for giving money to victims or investing in infrastructure and community enrichment? Match these deadlines with your mission (i.e. immediate relief or ongoing support?).
21	Create a short list of "talking points," or answers to questions you expect from donors, victims, and the media about your organization. Make sure all employees and volunteers have a copy to use in conversation, and when making decisions.
22	For new and smaller charities, establish your legitimacy by making known your tax-exempt status, non-profit registration, and, if any, affiliation with larger, more established charities.

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23	Publicize if you will or will not accept non-cash donations such as food, water, clothing, educational materials, etc.
24	Develop a method of tracking future donations that flow from public relations efforts.
RELIEF PHASE	
25	To ensure the best chance that all internal communication reaches its targets, send all messages via email, fax, intranet postings, and telephone when possible.
26	Strive to disseminate information to ALL victims. Translate messages into secondary languages that the affected communities use.
27	Assign a team to take notes and digital photographs of your organization in action for use in future fundraising activities.
28	Place competent, responsible administrators who are authorized to make decisions on the ground. Disasters cause confusion and "gray areas" regarding mission, victim eligibility, etc. High-level workers should be able to consider issues on a case-by-case basis.
29	On-the-ground disaster relief can be exhausting and emotionally overwhelming. Monitor the health of your staff and volunteers. Provide psychological support, time for rest, and a method for evacuation.
RECOVERY PHASE	
30	Build relationships with community leaders and involve them in setting priorities.
31	When providing aid, consider the victim's psychological need to feel useful. Do not treat them as helpless or passive. Involve them in decision making.
32	Instill a sense of purpose in victims by allowing them to be as self-reliant as possible during relief efforts. Extend this sense of self-worth by giving them the resources they need to cope with future consequences of the current disaster and possible future catastrophes.
REVIEW PHASE	
33	Evaluate a broad cross-section of victim applications for help - both those accepted and denied. Objectively determine the appropriateness of decisions, and overall success or failure to comply with the organization's mission.
34	Discuss actions of the organization as a whole, applying the stringent standards established during the readiness phase, but without assigning blame to individuals or groups.
35	Schedule coaching or training sessions in areas that did not meet standards.
36	Use the review to consider expanding or limiting the scope of aid offered and fundraising tactics in advance of the next disaster.
37	Determine any performance metrics you would like to add to better evaluate your organization during the next disaster.

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38	With stakeholders, plan meaningful ways to acknowledge their efforts and events to celebrate their participation and success.
39	Interview donors and victims to ascertain which specific aspects of their engagement with your organization were most appreciated and what areas were disappointing.
40	With donors, discuss ways they could expand their support in the future.
41	Explore the possibility of using existing donors to recruit additional givers - especially the wealthy and institutions with many resources.
42	Make difficult personnel decisions. Were the campaign chairman, fiscal agent, volunteer coordinator, fundraising chairman, on-site administrators, suppliers, etc. up to the task?
43	What needs outside your mission went un- or under-fulfilled. Are there areas your charity could fill next time?
44	Evaluate the effectiveness of your fundraising tactics. Measure them against organizations with similar resources. Did you omit important avenues of giving? Did you overlook market segments with an interest and ability to donate?
45	If you accepted restricted donations or non-cash gifts, did they present challenges out of proportion to their value? If so, consider refusing such gifts in the future or finding people and mechanisms to streamline their delivery.
46	Reinforce partnerships with government and other non-government organizations (NGOs) forged during the relief effort.
47	Leverage relationships with media and community leaders as well.
48	Evaluate your distribution plan. Was it effective and efficient? If you gave funds in a single distribution, would phases of distribution work better, or vice-versa?
49	Was your mission and philanthropic effort similar to another group's? If so, consider merging, meeting to carve out niches for each organization, or sharing best practices to make each other as efficient as possible.
50	Did you observe, or was your organization criticized for a lack of transparency or accountability? Were these criticisms valid and not merely "sour grapes" on the part of people denied aid? If so, make sure mechanisms are in place to correct the problem during the ensuing <i>Readiness</i> phase.

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Previous Installments:

[Lessons Learned from Recent Natural Disaster Relief Funds: Part 1 of 3](#)

[Lessons Learned from Recent Terrorist and Man-made Disaster Relief Funds: Part 2 of 3](#)

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