



Community-Based Organization Disaster Response Preparedness Toolkit

Updated February 2024

Overview

Every year, our communities will face disasters, including floods, storms, wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and even pandemics. Community-based organizations (CBOs) that do not have disaster response as part of their primary mission face new challenges during disasters as they pivot their programs to respond to the needs of their communities. An effective pivot requires organizations to think about things they would need to do at the organizational, program, and individual level. ***This toolkit addresses things to consider when creating a business plan, pivoting programs, and leading an organization during a disaster response.***

The toolkit originally was developed as part of an AmeriCorps VISTA special project hosted by Oregon-based Mercy Corps Northwest. It has been edited and updated to reflect conditions and resources in Florida. This toolkit is intended to complement the many resources that emergency management at the city, county, and state level offer to help organizations be better prepared for disasters. ***The primary audience is leaders at small to medium-size CBOs that do not have disaster response as part of their mission but are interested in learning how to be better prepared to continue serving their communities in times of disaster.***

Each of the three sections of the toolkit has an overview of the section's importance, and the learning objectives and actions for that section. This is followed by a chart with learning objectives or actions that will help CBOs improve their readiness to respond to a disaster. Each learning objective or action has an associated resource that CBOs can consult. CBOs should use the toolkit as a menu of options where they can choose preparedness learning objectives and actions that are most relevant to their context. We hope that this resource helps CBOs feel more confident in their preparedness to respond to disasters.

Florida Nonprofit Alliance would like to thank [Mercy Corps Northwest](#) and the [Nonprofit Association of Oregon](#) for permission to adapt the original tool kit they created in 2021.

1. Organizational Level: Creating a business continuity plan

Overview: If CBOs want to pivot their programs to respond to their community’s new needs during disasters, they first need to ensure that they can continue to carry out essential activities that keep their organizations functioning. A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) is a process to establish well-defined and consistent procedures and strategies to be used during any type of business disruption. It is a good first step when thinking about how CBOs can be prepared at an organizational level to support an emergency response.

The primary steps for creating a BCP are understanding risks and how these risks affect your essential functions, identifying key team members, identifying IT and communications systems, understanding the components of an IT disaster recovery plan, identifying essential records, creating an incident action plan, and deciding how you will test and update the BCP. You may also want to consider cross-training team members. If your organization tests your BCP during an emergency or other type of disruption, you will want to revise the plan as necessary.

Part 1 of the toolkit employs one key resource, a Business Continuity Plan Template and Guidance from [Coordinated Consulting](#), which is recommended as your primary resource. Additional resources are listed when applicable for further exploration.

Topic	Learning Objective or Action	Relevant Pages of Coordinated Consulting BCP Template	Additional Resources	Time to review	Resource type
1.1 Basics of Business Continuity Planning	Understand why your organization should consider creating a BCP	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 3-4			
1.2 Risk Management	Understand the risks your organization faces and how this affects your essential functions	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 4-10	FloridaDisaster.org	varies	Disaster preparedness maps
Hazards and Vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Identify hazards- Calculate the probability and impact of possible hazards	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 4-6, Appendix A (Page 24-25)	AlertFlorida – check alerts for your county or community	15-30 minutes	Florida Division of Emergency Management

Insurance	Explore the insurance options your organization has and ensure policies cover hazards prioritized in the hazards and vulnerability assessment	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 6-8	Nonprofit Risk Management Center (Florida Nonprofit Alliance is an affiliate member)	10 minutes	Consulting, training, templates and other resources
Business Impact	Identify and prioritize essential functions for your organization	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 8-10, Appendix B (Page 26)			
1.3 Continuity Personnel and Teams	Identify team members for the Business Continuity Planning Team, Essential Function Leads and Backups, and Leadership Team	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 10-14, and the BCP Contacts Toolkit (Excel worksheet that accompanies the Coordinated Consulting Template)			
1.4 Communications and IT Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the communications and IT systems associated with your essential functions - Identify your audiences and how you will communicate with them 	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 15-17			
Technology and communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify your organization's critical IT and communication systems associated with your essential functions and the communication systems used to communicate with your audiences - Learn the purpose of a crisis communications plan, who will need to be included, and what type of information will need to be communicated 	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 15-16	Communications During COVID-19 and Other Disasters -- TechSoup Communicating During a Crisis – Nonprofit Risk Management Center	15 minutes	Guidance

Internal communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop messaging that will be used if the Business Continuity Plan is activated - Have a plan for how to communicate with your team members. 	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 16-17	Colorado Crisis Communication Planning – Colorado Nonprofit Association	60 minutes	Guidance document with template
External communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop strategies for external communications if the Business Continuity Plan is activated. - Learn how to help manage communications during a crisis, including developing key messages, media releases, and notifications. 	Coordinated Consulting Template, Page 17	Colorado Crisis Communication Planning – Colorado Nonprofit Association	60 minutes	Guidance document with template
1.5 IT Disaster Recovery	Understand the components of an IT disaster recovery plan	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 17-18	Data Backup Options, US-CERT Four things you need to know to protect against cyber threats, NTEN	6 pages 10 minutes	Document Article
1.6 Essential Records	List record names, type, and location needed for essential functions	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 18-19			
1.7 Alternate Operations	Create an Incident Action Plan	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 19-21, Appendix C (Page 27)			
1.8 Plan Testing, Updates, and Location	Decide how you will test and update the Business Continuity Plan, and where it will be stored	Coordinated Consulting Template, Pages 21-23			
1.9 Cross-train Key Individuals	Learn best practices for planning for the impact of emergencies on staff		Key Personnel – Emergency Preparedness – Do 1 Thing	10 minutes	Guidance

2. Program Level: Pivoting programs

Overview: During a disaster, CBOs may choose to modify existing programs, or move into new programming. In order to do this, it is important to consider who you want to serve and what their needs are. You also will need to think about whether you plan to use volunteers, and how you will manage donations (monetary and in-kind) and grants. Finally, you will need to think about how you coordinate with other nonprofits, coordination groups, and government. An effective response involves multiple actors, and you will want to understand how to work with all of them.

This section does not cover technical guidance for programs, such as how to run a shelter, operate a feeding program, or distribute goods. The best place to learn more about technical guidance for running disaster programs is the [Sphere Handbook](#). This includes minimum humanitarian standards in water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion (WASH), food security and nutrition, shelter, and health. Keep in mind however that you will also need to check with local authorities about guidance during the response.

Topic	Learning Objective or Action	Resources	Time to review	Resource type
2.1 Identify key needs of clients post disaster	Learn how to create and conduct a needs assessment	Needs Assessments – Disaster Ready.org	10 minutes	Online course
		Emergency Needs Assessments – IFRC	45 Minutes	Guide
		Rapid Needs Assessment – CARE	45 minutes	Guide
2.2 Volunteer Management	Learn the fundamentals of spontaneous volunteer management	Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster – Points of Light Foundation	60 minutes+	Booklet
	Learn about the importance of consistent messaging to manage spontaneous volunteers	Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster – Corporation for National Community Services and Hands On Network	60 minutes+	Training course materials
	Become familiar with Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities	Volunteer Rights & Responsibilities UC San Diego	5 minutes	Reference

<p>2.3 Donations and Grants Management</p>	<p>Learn about managing an increase in donations (gifts in kind) or funds (grants)</p> <p>Learn how to develop a plan and public messaging to best manage donations</p> <p>Create a Gift Acceptance Policy to avoid donations that do not benefit or fit the organization's mission</p>	<p>Disaster Recovery – What Donors & Nonprofits Need To Know; National Council of Nonprofits</p> <p>Volunteer Florida</p> <p>Gift Acceptance Policies – National Council of Nonprofits</p>	<p>15 minutes</p> <p>10 minutes</p> <p>5 minutes</p>	<p>Guidance</p> <p>State coordinating resource</p> <p>Guidance</p>
<p>2.4 Coordination</p>	<p>Understand how you will partner and coordinate with other entities involved in disaster response, and what you do prior to an emergency to establish relationships with them</p> <p>Learn about coordination groups for organizations and volunteers active in disaster response</p> <p>Learn about philanthropic networks</p> <p>Learn about government roles</p>	<p>Florida Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD)</p> <p>Community Organizations Active in Disasters: selected examples</p> <p>Sarasota County</p> <p>Charlotte County</p> <p>Duval County</p> <p>Big Bend</p> <p>Florida Nonprofit Alliance</p> <p>Florida Philanthropic Network</p>		

3. Individual Level: Leading an organization

Overview: The leader of a CBO, as well as others in positions of leadership throughout the organization, can help a response be effective. The soft skills listed below, while not an exhaustive list of skills necessary for effective leadership in emergencies, will help your organization lay the groundwork for a successful response.

First, leaders need to be attentive to the well-being of their teams and promote self-care. This can start even before a disaster, when leaders should encourage all team members to be prepared at home for emergencies by doing simple things such as signing up for Public Alerts, making an emergency communications plan with their families, and assembling some basic supplies.

Leaders also need to be able to communicate with their boards of directors about proposed changes, navigate ambiguity, and engage in continual learning, both during the response and afterward.

Finally, centering and promoting equity and inclusion during emergency response and recovery is crucial. This is important to consider both within the organization and as part of the response itself.

Topic	Learning Objective or Action	Resources	Time to review	Resource type
3.1 Supporting wellness and self-care of staff	Learn how to build personal and organizational resilience to the impact of stress on workers and managers who are responding to disasters	Wellness and Resilience for Frontline Workers and Managers", Kaya	2 hours	Online course
	Identify three different coping styles to respond to stress and learn self-care tips for each	Optimizing Your Self-Care Based on Your Coping Style", Headington Institute	5 minutes	Video
3.2 Navigating and communicating with board	Learn best practices for working with boards of directors to approve changes in your organization's programs in response to a disaster	"Crisis Communications: 4 Things Your Board Needs to Know", Board Source	10 minutes	Document
		"What Nonprofit Boards Should Be Doing Right Now to Address the COVID-19 Situation", BoardSource	15 minutes	Article

3.3 Leading in Ambiguity	Learn tips for how to lead an organization's staff and volunteers during changes in programming during a disaster	Making Sense of Uncertainty: Nonprofit Scenario Planning Bridgespan	12 minutes	Guidance, toolkit
3.4 Learning from responses	Understand the importance of conducting a post-response review in order to learn and improve	What Are After-Action Reviews? – ASANA	8 minutes	Guidance
3.5 Applying an equity and inclusion lens to response	Reflect on how to advance equity at your organization during times of crisis, and how have a culturally sensitive approach in your response	"Crises as a Catalyst", ProInspire, DisasterReady Cultural Considerations," Multnomah County Department of County Human Services https://youtu.be/PF0GmGaRVz4	30 minutes 12 minutes	Guide Video

Key Resources:

In Florida:

Alert Florida – <https://apps.floridadisaster.org/alertflorida/>

Florida Division of Emergency Management -- www.floridadisaster.org

Florida Department of Commerce and Florida Division of Emergency Management -- <https://floridadisaster.biz/>

Florida Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters – <https://voadflorida.wpengine.com/>

Volunteer Florida – www.volunteerflorida.org

Florida Nonprofit Alliance – www.flnonprofits.org

Florida Philanthropic Network – www.fpnetwork.org

Other:

BoardSource – www.boardsource.org

CARE – www.careemergencytoolkit.org

Coordinated Consulting – www.coordinatedconsulting.com

DisasterReady – www.disasterready.org

Do1Thing – www.do1thing.com

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – www.ifrc.org

National Council of Nonprofits – www.councilofnonprofits.org

Nonprofit Risk Management Center – www.nonprofitrisk.org

NTEN – www.nten.org

Tech Soup – www.techsoup.org