

Overview of Long-Term Disaster Recovery Issues for Nashville Social/Human Services

Lessons from Other Localities, Best Practices and Local Observations



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Sources of information include: U. S. Federal Emergency Management Agency Urban Institute, Natural Hazards Center-Univ. of Colorado-Boulder, Louisiana Recovery Corps, National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, University of Tennessee's National Recommendations of Disaster Food Handling, Disaster Preparedness and Management Program, The National Academies, Saint Xavier University, U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, U. S. Small Business Administration.

Introduction

Regardless of the location or type of event, there are many lessons to be learned from what occurred before, during and after other disasters in localities that experienced disasters. Local government and nonprofit agencies need to be involved in the initial relief phase as well as in longer recovery efforts.

Long-term recovery plans must address social/human service needs, particularly for special populations such as the elderly, people with disabilities and low-income residents. People at all income levels were affected by the flood and benefitted from immediate disaster relief. However, **families with limited financial resources were already struggling with basic needs, making their recovery even more difficult.**

Initial relief and recovery occurs while the emergency command organization is in place. Later recovery and rebuilding activities fall within the ongoing responsibilities of individual government departments and missions of non-profit agencies. These longer-term recovery tasks require the cooperation of many public and private agencies.

Although there was a tremendous relief effort during the immediate period following the flood, we know from other disasters that we are at the beginning of process and must prepare for short-term response (up to one year), and years of sustained recovery, restoration, rebuilding and redevelopment.

The effectiveness of a disaster response depends on the effectiveness of the preparedness. **Community involvement is important for both effective disaster planning and preparedness, as well as for developing recovery projects.** The coming months, while community awareness is high would be an excellent time to begin planning for future disasters.

Many localities have created broad-based ongoing committees that include all aspects of disaster response planning (including social/human services). The information below includes information about short-term and long-term recovery systems, including what has been most effective in other disasters.

Recovery activities will support the re-establishment of a functioning community that will sustain itself over time.

Recovery projects should be part of the community involvement process, including community meetings, discussions with community leaders, organizations, and existing plans for the community.

FEMA has developed a process for communities to create a Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR) Plans. The LTCR process involves an assessment tool of the community to organize the federal support to communities for recovery from a disaster.

The product of the LTCR process is a strategic recovery plan with a series of projects, programs or processes ranked as high, moderate, or low priority

and identification of a range of potential resources. Prioritization of community projects and programs provides guidance for the allocation of Private, Local, State, and Federal resources.

Communication of important information among victims, relief workers and other service providers is a recurring issue in disasters. There should be a centralized accurate, accessible catalog of information about services and resources needed by disaster victims.

Specific efforts are needed to ensure equal attention for all neighborhoods affected by the flood. For example, in Nashville, initial media reports focused on the Bellevue and Downtown areas. Many of the questions directed at local officials during the daily briefings were about these two locations. Some residents of the eastern and northern areas of Davidson County expressed concern that these areas did not receive media attention until at least two days after the flood. One of the concerns expressed about the delay was that media coverage could have increased the level of awareness, aid, volunteers and resources more evenly across affected areas.

It is difficult to make a useful plan without valid data to assess the impact of the disaster. For social and human services, some pre-disaster information is available in both the 2009 Community Needs Evaluation and the Poverty Initiative Plan, as well as from other service providers and related coalitions.

Social/Human Service Needs

There were already gaps and unmet needs in the social/human services delivery system. The disaster resulted in a level of need most had never anticipated. In a disaster situation with massive losses, the unmet needs increased exponentially. Cooperation, coordination and collaboration are even more important now. Service delivery should be targeted to help those are unable to recover on their own.

Disaster relief and recovery programs address short-term needs (food, shelter, etc.) and long-term needs (repair of public utilities, etc.). Federal assistance can provide an array of assistance programs to help support direct services to individuals (counseling, health care, etc.), or provide loans to renters, homeowners or small businesses.

Previous disaster situations note the importance of increased funding and maximum flexibility of funding. This includes waivers of program restrictions or transfer of funds across programs, including the use of SSBG and CDBG funds for disaster-related needs.

Reports on previous disasters note that disaster victims may require a number of services for a long period following a disaster. This means that disaster relief should be structured to support both the short-term assistance and long-term recovery support.

Many service organizations were already at or near capacity. Consideration should be given to existing service recipients and how the increased demand will affect the ability of programs to serve the dual demands of their existing caseloads plus the needs that arose because of the disaster.

In the near future, a functional process should be developed to ensure that the resources for flood relief help people who need it most.

Casework, including assessment and client tracking, are important from the beginning. Caseworkers can work with individuals to create a recovery plan, determine the person's eligibility for various forms of assistance, and through that process identify areas of unmet needs that would help clients fulfill their long-term recovery plan and become self-sufficient.

In addition, the information technology infrastructure should be better incorporated into managing risk and recovery from disaster.

There should be a centralized location for information about how people can access the array of services and resources available eligibility requirements for each program.

Long-Term Services and Recovery

Following major disasters, longer-term recovery will be a significant issue and should be incorporated in disaster preparedness. People who are directly involved in traumatic events may need assistance for years after the disaster, long after the immediate and short-term assistance has ended. Other localities often note the continuing need for assistance in the area of social services, such as mental health, case management and employment-related support services.

Long-term social services are needed because emotional and other effects of disaster may be difficult to resolve quickly or because problems may sometimes emerge again. In addition, some affected by the disaster do not immediately seek assistance for various reasons. Financial recovery may never be possible for some affected families and it may take years for others.

While longer-term services are sometimes unavailable, research following September 11 confirms the need for a continuum of services, and that some portion of disaster funds should be reserved for long-term services. The Red Cross used some of the donations it received to establish funding for longer-term recovery assistance for individuals and families with more lasting financial, health, and emotional needs resulting from September 11. Short term services were provided through the Red Cross, and transitioned to grantee organizations to provide services when victims' other resources were phasing out.

“Providing Long-Term Services after Major Disasters,” Urban Institute, Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy, described research conducted on services provided to help people directly affected by September 11 for longer-term recovery needs. The assistance included grants to community-based organizations to provide various services (case management, mental health, etc.) to eligible persons.

Results of surveys of 1,501 persons who received services through the American Red Cross September 11 Recovery Program and the Recovery Grants Program, plus a survey of 66 community-based nonprofits, which received grants and 347 of the clients, they served. They

found that the identification of the need for assistance to overcome the effects of traumatic events and loss can be significant and continue for years after the event, and that 43% of service providers said some families still needed services four years after the event (most frequently mental health services).

In providing recovery services, the findings noted that some persons did not seek mental health services they needed because of an associated stigma. To enhance participation, service providers used nonthreatening language (care management, educational seminars, stress management, etc.); provided outreach; attracted clients by combining other services in combination with mental health services (such as help with housing, health, immigration issues, etc.); and provided services in a welcoming atmosphere using cultural and language competency.

Other findings indicate the importance of providing long-term accessible services (at convenient times and locations). Reports noted that the involvement of stakeholders can increase access to individuals who need services. It is also important to address parental resistance to provide services to children/youth, including working through schools and other institutions where children are located, and using approaches and materials appropriate for the age group being served.

Funding Issues

As in some other areas affected by disaster, Nashville already lacked sufficient social/human services to meet the needs of the community. Following a major disaster, public funds are essential to support relief and recovery efforts. Assistance should be timely, targeted and effective.

Because many organizations are not usually in the business of handing out assistance directly to families and individuals, mechanisms should be created to administer and provide supportive services and financial assistance directly to persons in need.

As new funds become available, policymakers should consider both the overall capacity of social/human services and the priorities of services (what types of services and to whom).

As additional funding or funding with greater flexibility is used for emergency services, there is the potential to apply these principles to increase the effectiveness of social/human services in nonemergency situations. Because of the long-term nature of needs and the typical short-term disaster relief funding, best practices suggest that funds be reserved or identified for long-term needs.

As contributions accumulate, there should be a prompt method to distribute both services and financial assistance to those in need.

This can be done by the public entities, Community Based Organizations, and faith-based entities that serve families and individuals.

Large organizations (United Way, Community Foundation, etc.) and small organizations are raising significant amounts of funding. Various benefit performances are also being held for other anticipated recipients.

There is some community awareness that these activities are raising funds and goods to help disaster victims. However, there are questions about how these funds will be used and especially how victims can access and use the funds. Eligibility and resources may vary by organization for how to use contributions toward disaster relief, but there should be a system to expedite service delivery and direct financial assistance.

Workforce and Business Continuity

Disasters overwhelm the infrastructure of social/human services delivery. Studies show that these **disasters, including floods, disproportionately affect elderly, single mothers, and low-income residents.**

Disasters give rise to more needs in affected areas across a time continuum. There is uncertainty about how long disaster recovery will take, as well as about the degree to which it will help restore people in need. Nashville and the State of Tennessee initially responded well, and it is important to review the systems and processes used to prepare for future situations. Studies on other disasters in other localities for short-term issues related to public benefits include:

- Federal response for recovery and relief should be communicated clearly with state and local authorities, including disaster relief funds. This is important because some programs are federally administered and others by state or local authorities. The communication clearly helps the ultimate authority that is in charge of operations and coordination.
- Activate disaster funds immediately for those who might become eligible due to the disaster.
- Explore federal assurance to states that the newly impacted individuals and families to lessen the impact on state fiscal capacity to cover more people for these benefits.
- Clarify short-term FEMA disaster funds and long-term need that might exist after the short-term assistance exhausted.
- Expedite the state processes for Unemployment Insurance due to the disaster, including the Disaster Unemployment for those who are not qualified for the regular State Unemployment Insurance.
- Because Federal benefits (Medicaid, TANF, etc.) are channeled through states, eligibility standards should be expedited for victims of the disaster.

Long-Term Workforce Issues include:

- Disasters affect businesses that in turn affect employment opportunities for workers. Business recovery is essential to the long-term health of the local economy. The Small Business Administration has provided nationwide disaster assistance to help the economy of disaster areas to recover, although it is unlikely that their assistance will completely restore the capacity of any recipients.
- For low-income workers who are displaced by floods and other disasters, it is important that they obtain stable housing (more permanent than temporary). Business recovery would benefit if stable housing is expedited, which would facilitate the employment of workers as job openings become available.
- Other localities have also identified that there should be greater public awareness of flood insurance or other appropriate disaster coverage. While it would not affect the damage already sustained, it could prevent additional loss in the future.
- Specifically include the needs of low-income families in disaster planning to address the disproportionate impact they experience during disaster, and to potentially expedite the return to the workforce.
- Encourage low-income people to use the banking system. In addition to the traditional benefits to typical workers, it also expedites FEMA funding assistance through direct deposits.

For many businesses, a new normal will emerge, meaning that businesses will have to adapt to regain continuity.

With regard to Business Continuity, community support is essential for many businesses to survive after a disaster. There are no currently agreed-upon standards for business continuity. Continuity processes are often ignored when the economy is bad. Businesses want to “return to normal” as quickly as possible.

Employees are affected when their employers experience disruption due to disasters. For businesses that are inoperable for a significant period, most do not continue providing pay for employees. Even if the business is able to recover quickly, there may be lost wages for those who already could barely pay for their basic needs.

Children and Youth

Children and youth who experience disasters often suffer damage emotionally, even if not physically. Their mental health and well-being can suffer for an extended period. As seen after Hurricane Katrina, in many families, both parents and children remained in limbo, without permanent homes, settled school situations, or ongoing connections with such necessary services.

Recovery was impaired by the lack of needed services, resulting from damage to the infrastructure of the service delivery system.

These emerging needs combined with the preexisting unmet needs in the community created delays in providing help to those who needed it.

While Nashville's flood was not as widespread as New Orleans' hurricane, similar circumstances exist for those who were directly affected. These include sudden separation from family and friends, witnessing damage caused by the disaster, feelings of abandonment and uncertainty about their future. In addition, age-appropriate information should be available from trusted sources to inform children and youth.

In New Orleans and Nashville, before the disasters occurred, there was already a shortage of high quality programs to meet the needs of children, especially those who were from low income families. Although less in Nashville than in New Orleans, some service programs (from child care to other programs) sustained damage from which recovery may be slow. In New Orleans, the long-term effects on human services programs are still being measured.

Research emphasizes the importance of effective partnerships between nonprofit organizations, federal, state and local government agencies. Services for children should be enhanced to meet the short-term and long-term needs of flood victims. This approach enables children and young people to return to normalcy, establish daily routines, minimize the impact of sudden disruption, proactively identifying children who need additional attention because of the disaster.

Best practices involve these elements:

- High-Intensity – Expand before and after school programs, with more hours and capacity, using individualized plans of care for each child.
- High Quality – Programs should recruit the most experienced teachers and mentors coupled with the use of National Education Standards.
- Comprehensive – programs should be tailored to meet a range of physical/emotional needs of children through counseling and age appropriate activities

This approach enables children and young people to return to normal by establishing daily routines, minimizing the negative effects of sudden disruption. A proactive approach identifies children who need help because of the disaster so they can receive the services they need.

Housing

Recovery of housing following a disaster usually falls into different phases. Phase 1 (through several weeks after the disaster) consists of community Emergency Response, and includes immediate actions taken to reduce life-safety hazards and make short-term repairs to critical lifelines.

During this time, people affected are looking for safety, emergency food and temporary shelter, and they are beginning to realize the extent of the damage and its effect on their families. Housing activities focus on immediate safe haven shelter for a few days while the situation stabilizes, and emergency shelter and food for weeks following the event. This phase usually lasts several weeks from the beginning of the disaster.

During this phase, localities usually performed the following activities:

- Frequent news releases, newspaper articles, press conferences and other communication by local government to residents about where to find housing and the status of response actions
- Increased temporary flexibility in government programs, such as opening eligibility and increasing benefit levels, transferring funds between programs, mortgage/rent payment waivers and waiving some restrictions about how program funds can be used.
- Understanding and accommodating for people with special needs, disabilities, and/or low incomes.
- Caseworker involvement for assessment and documentation, connecting people with emergency housing resources, counseling, etc.

Phase 2 involves Clean-up and Recovery and may overlap with Phase 1. Ongoing social/human service needs are addressed before permanent rebuilding is complete. Affected people begin to seek community resources and to help each other. Phase 2 can last beyond the first year, as community and government organizations begin providing more organized assistance. Other Phase 2 housing activities include debris clean-up, short-term repair of lifeline utilities, coordinated damage assessment and building inspections, and the beginning of re-occupancy of buildings.

Typical elements in this phase include:

- Hold community forums at which residents are updated by local officials about local government responses, waivers of local codes and other program fees and restrictions, and recovery plans. Input is also solicited from residents about neighborhood needs.
- Organize a Long Term Recovery Coalition to coordinate community recovery activities, document people served and funds spent, as well as to work on longer-term planning.
- Create a Recovery Center – a one-stop location for people to access services, such as housing, loans, and re/construction resources.
- Develop Project Champions and additional resources to fund for specific projects.

- Acknowledge and address stress issues of those who work on relief and recovery efforts. The staff of businesses and agencies (those that experienced damage and those who provide services for disaster relief) will have increased stress trying to balance the demands of work and home.
- Some employees may be among those who are personally affected and who are overwhelmed trying to cope with work and with devastation in the other parts of their lives (home, family, friends, church, schools, etc.). They may need counseling, and employers will need to have patience and provide special considerations to their staff to assist in them in the healing process

Phase 3, the Long-Term Recovery phase, includes repairing, rebuilding and restoring of damaged buildings and infrastructure and the resumption of normal social and economic life in the community. During this time, interim housing is provided to those who cannot return to their previous homes (such as FEMA trailers); municipal utilities are fully restored; normal city services are provided; examination of building codes and ordinances and planning for responses to future disasters takes place. These activities may start as early as the first year and continue for several years.

Lessons learned and actions in other localities during Phase 3 include:

- There will be a need for free professional mental health counseling to cope with lingering stress, especially for those in temporary housing. Relief workers may also need supportive counseling.
- Caseworkers will be needed to create family recovery plans. Continued assistance to access various forms of assistance and resources will be needed to help the clients become self-sufficient
- During this phase, there are opportunities for improvement which can provide long-term benefits, such as performing deferred maintenance and making improvements in physical structures. Agencies may find less resistance to needed realignment of priorities during this time.
- **After a disaster, affordable housing (already in short supply) may become scarcer. Some low-income housing will not rebuilt and rents will be higher after the disaster. Low-income homeowners (e.g. elderly) will not be able to rebuild and will be added to lengthy waiting lists for rental housing.**
- Commercial services like groceries may not return to low-income neighborhoods.
- The number of people needing assistance from government and nonprofit agencies will increase. After the disaster, people who were struggling to pay monthly rent or mortgages will increase waiting lists at assistance agencies (which probably will not get commensurate increases in funding).

A Linn County, Iowa, disaster follow-up report gives a summary of ongoing problems they faced in this phase:

“Sixteen months later, families are still struggling to navigate a complex network of resources and availability. Individuals who are retired, living on limited income, individuals living with disabilities, and single parents all face unique challenges in finding sufficient resources to return their families to safe, affordable, secure housing. Individuals living in FEMA-assisted housing struggle with future housing plans. All survivors need encouragement and guidance as they apply for resources, appeal decisions and make plans for the future.”

After the June 2008 flood of the Mississippi River, the Linn Area Long Term Recovery Coalition was formed in Linn County, Iowa. This coalition sought public input in a variety of ways, including public meetings, to get information and ideas from people who were affected in various ways. These committees and coalitions may begin during the first year after the disaster and will continue for several years.

Food

In fundamental ways, social programs were not designed to respond readily to a crisis as devastating as Nashville’s flood. For the basic need of food, emergency response mechanisms were activated immediately after the flooding. It is important that there be short-term and long-term plans that include how government (Federal, State and Metro Government) would handle financial obligations, risks, and policy choices.

Nashville’s low-income families already experienced a lack of food security, which worsened directly and indirectly because of the disaster. Examples include food destroyed by flood or lack of electricity, destruction of the home and appliances needed to store food or through loss of income need to purchase food. Disaster planning and recovery should identify which programs would serve which evacuees, in what ways, and for how long, considering the already existing and the new needs.

Nashville’s early disaster relief was prompt in becoming operational. Mayor Dean quickly identified Second Harvest Food Bank as the lead agency in distributing food to flood victims. In addition, the Red Cross and several area churches have provided emergency food boxes to families affected by the storm. The Tennessee Department of Human Services soon applied to the Federal government for emergency relief to provide food stamps to effected families.

All of the area emergency shelters established to house people were equipped to provide meals. At some locations, two food distribution systems were used effectively. In addition to providing meals and snacks to those who were on site, relief food boxes with water were distributed. The size and weight of the relief boxes and water created problems for those who lacked transportation. Others requested food vouchers for grocery stores instead.

Many service programs resumed operations very quickly. For example, the Senior Nutrition sites operated by Metro Social Services were out of operation only two days, and home delivered meals were disrupted for only one day.

National recommendations for disaster food handling have already been developed. Ongoing efforts are needed to ensure continuing public awareness of those issues:

- Food/Supplies to have ready to take with you in an emergency
- Emergency Clean water sources
- Water purification procedures (boiling)
- Proper procedures for disinfecting cookware/utensils/food prep area
- Foods to discard/keep in flood emergencies

Senior Citizens and Disabled Adults

As experienced in other disasters, a psychological resilience within older adults enables them to cope with disasters in the short-term. After disaster strikes, many older adults fare better than younger and middle-aged adults do. This may be due to better coping styles and earlier life experiences, especially experiences with similar disasters.

Most older adults trust local, state, and federal public health authorities, as well as health care providers. It is important that appropriate communication avenues be used to share information with older adults. Seniors indicated that their top sources of information from local television news reports and national television news programs. Newspapers were the third most frequently used source of information, with internet access very limited for older persons.

Despite their ability to cope on a short-term basis, elderly persons were more vulnerable to stress related to relocation, lack of transportation and loss of normalcy. The long-term effects are reflected in higher morbidity rates, increased health care cost and a sense of isolation. Older adults are at an increased risk of mortality during a disaster.

Effective disaster relief and planning include:

- First Responders should have training to ensure elderly persons are identified and their location known to emergency personnel.
- There should be an adequate amount of medical and food supplies are on hand in case of there is an inability to reach seniors in a timely manner is an issue.
- First responders should have emergency contacts names and phone numbers.

Seniors and adults with physical challenges live in a variety of settings. For persons who live in long-term residential care, there should be special consideration, with much already in place. Residents should be aware that they may be questioned by public health, emergency management, other regulatory bodies, and the families of our residents as to what is being done protect residents.

Organizations and Volunteers

The community's vision of itself and its future is very important for recovery. **Nonprofit organizations and community-based organizations are generous, but sometimes assistance after a disaster is not timely or most appropriate, due to funding restrictions and requirements.** Small community-based organizations serve very vulnerable persons, but may not be on the radar screen of traditional disaster relief and recovery services. These smaller organizations may not have the resources to bounce back after a disaster.

Faith-based organizations play an important role in disaster situations. Faith-based organizations have a deep understanding of the local community, and can serve across multiple religions. They can provide information about services and community-level leadership. While faith-based organizations can recruit volunteers quickly and provide effective immediate relief efforts, they may lack the capacity to sustain long-term recovery efforts.

The faith community, secular nonprofits and government structures must work together. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services commissioned a study of post-Katrina relief efforts by faith-based and community organizations. From 200 survey responses, findings were:

- **More planning should occur before an emergency to understand organizational capacity and where agencies would best fit recovery efforts.**
- Outside volunteers should be connected with people locally who understand the community.
- Understand local culture through connections with local and community residents.
- **The lack of coordination was a major impediment in providing assistance to Katrina victims.**
- More than 2/3 of the organizations that provided services for Katrina victims had never done any disaster relief before.
- Leadership efforts should include both the capacity to precisely get the job done and compassion and understanding.

Organizations must know the limitations for the types of services they can provide after a disaster.

It is essential that organizations cooperate rather than compete.

Disaster Resiliency

Resiliency is a process, not an outcome. Resiliency is about systems instead of individuals, with a focus on people, organizations, livelihoods and services. Resilience adapts to the disturbance and facilitates a quick return to operation. In addition to effective traditional preparedness, resiliency is enhanced by community-wide economic strength (not specific to disaster but the capacity to solve the problems of the community). A resilient community will be able to bounce back, minimize damage and avoid cascading failures.