

Faith Communities & Donations Management

TIP SHEET

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Financial and material donations are part of the fabric of disaster recovery—and a traditional function of faith communities and their houses of worship. You may rely on donations to support your community and its disaster recovery program, or you may provide guidance on how best to support to a recovery operation outside your community.

CASH IS BEST! CASH IS BEST! CASH IS BEST!

Americans are known the world over as a generous people—and houses of worship are frequently at the forefront of collecting donations. But donations management, like all other aspects of emergency management, is a specialized skill. Cash, always the donation-of-choice, allows an impacted community to rapidly address emerging needs rather than to expend limited cash resources to manage often overwhelming amounts of unusable material goods.

CLOTHES & DONATED GOODS CAN CREATE A SECOND DISASTER

FUNDRAISING

• General Guidelines Related to Disaster-Related Fundraising

- **Make fundraising the focal point of your plan.** Most disaster relief organizations prefer cash donations and grants because they can support direct services or purchase supplies specifically needed in real time. Monies also can help stimulate the local economy in disaster-affected areas. Donated goods entail processing and storage costs and should be solicited carefully to ensure you receive what you need in a timely and efficient manner (see tips below).
- **Leverage your donated dollar.** There is power in numbers and matching grants. Work through existing networks (National VOAD agencies, local emergency management organizations, community foundations and businesses) to develop inter-agency unmet-needs funds or long-term recovery programs that avoid duplication of services.
- **Accounting practices and distribution efforts must be transparent and well documented.** You need to be able to defend and be proud of the way you are spending your money and distributing goods.
- **Don't spend too soon. Save money for long term recovery.** There are numerous pressures at the beginning of a disaster operation to raise money, and then spend it quickly. Simply put, this choice is short-sighted and irresponsible.
- **Communicate clearly what you need, and what you intend to do with the money.** If you are raising money for recovery work within your own community, will funds go directly to your house of worship? program? survivor/s?

• Organizations and Consortiums that Will Be Doing Disaster-Related Fundraising

- **Non-profit organizations** with established disaster programs (many of them faith-based).
- **Social service organizations**, to provide disaster-related case-work services and other direct services.
- **New organizations that emerge** as a result of a disaster. (Avoid this temptation unless there is broad support.)
- **Community foundations and local governments**, which may set up funds for a particular purpose. Your house of worship and faith-based disaster program, if engaged in disaster recovery, may be eligible to apply for these funds

• Never Reinvent the Wheel - Support Existing Programs of Effective Organizations

Common mistake: A house of worship with no experience in disaster ministry may assume that a particular need they identify is one they should start a program to address — without confirming that assumption in partnership with broader community social service networks, local VOAD, or emergency managers. This assumption should be avoided.

- **Educate your leadership and members** about donating to National VOAD agencies or effective local providers.
- **If you are raising funds to donate**, know whom you're giving to, what the money is used for, what percentage goes to administrative overhead, etc. Check out their programs and their effectiveness.

A NOTE OF CAUTION—ETHICAL, LEGAL AND TRANSPARENT DISTRIBUTION POLICIES ARE VITAL:

- **Plan carefully before engaging in fundraising activities.** Fundraising efforts that are mismanaged run the risk of tarnishing the reputation of your house of worship, your partnerships, and your ability to support ongoing programs.
- **Coordinate** cash or material donations **with local donations management efforts**; donate only to meet a clearly **identified unmet need** based on a needs assessment; and distribute recovery monies and materials based on a transparent and fair triage system that has **written policies and procedures**. Then report back to your donors.
- **Keep detailed records. Track donations** to determine their effective use and sustainable outcomes.

MATERIAL DONATIONS

- **Have a plan:** Have a donations management plan; coordinate it with other local efforts. **Train and practice your plan.**
- **Be careful what you ask for and what you accept.** Coordinate real-time needs of your program or the needs of others via your local donations manager. Non-specific requests to broad audiences WILL result in an influx of goods. And once the faucet is open, it is virtually impossible to turn it off. It can often cost more money and volunteer hours to store and discard unwanted items than it does to purchase or ship useful materials.
- **Make targeted appeals** that are very specific. Include:
 - **Exact quantity and type** of goods needed
 - **Shipping and warehousing requirements**
 - **Time constraints**
- **If you are a direct service provider** and intend to provide items/services to clients or members, consider:
 - Is **consistency** important to you? Do you want all your clients to receive the same items? What will you do with donations that aren't consistent with your plans?
 - If you will accept **in-kind donations** such as vacations or scholarships, how will you decide which clients will be offered such donations? Have transparent written policies or procedures.
- **Plan for how you will handle offers of goods you don't want or need. Answer: "Just say no," upfront.**
- Plan to **manage unsolicited donations** that come to your house of worship anyway. Even with good messaging, you will receive unsolicited goods, especially if you have a visible presence in the community. Think about:
 - **Food:** There are a number of safety and legal issues around using donated food items. Work with your local organizations that have experience managing perishable and nonperishable food donations. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also has excellent food safety information: www.fsis.usda.gov.
 - **Coordinate** with other organizations and your local emergency management agency's donations manager. Your local or state VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) can offer guidance. You may be able to share warehouse space, exchange goods, or get volunteer support for processing donated items.

National Donations Management System with FEMA

Aidmatrix connects the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency with more than 35 U.S. State, territory and city/local governments and with members of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) to form a network for immediate response in the event of a disaster. These parties are able to share information and donations online in real time. The system includes supply chain management, volunteer management and fundraising technologies.



Download the NDMS Disaster Relief Brochure: http://www.aidmatrix.org/relief-programs/NDMN_trifold.pdf

Call Your VOAD or Local Government Referral Hotline (211 or 311) to Learn More about Donations Management

DISASTER DONATIONS & FUNDRAISING SYSTEMS

- **Donations Management Systems**
 - National VOAD and government agencies **discourage the public from sending unsolicited goods** to a disaster scene. However, even with clear public messages that discourage donated goods, these will be sent.
 - In order to organize, house, and distribute these goods, **states and localities have donations management plans and a designated donations manager** to lead these efforts.
- **Donations Warehouse Systems**
 - Donated goods warehouses are established by local governments, VOAD or their partners.
 - Within National VOAD there are faith-based agencies that very effectively operate donations warehouses, including; Brethren Disaster Ministries Service Center, Adventist Community Services, the Salvation Army, and World Vision.
 - You can tap into these sources of goods through your local VOAD. Priority for distributing goods is usually:
 - 1) Victims and recovery workers
 - 2) Organizations supporting recovery work
 - 3) Nonprofit organizations that can use these items for other programs

OTHER RESOURCES

- **Adventist Community Services:** <http://www.communityservices.org/article.php?id=183>, or call 301.680.6438
- **Brethren Disaster Ministries Service Center:** www.brethren.org/brethrenservicecenter, or call 410.635.8747
- **Charity Navigator—Online independent charity evaluator:** <http://www.charitynavigator.org/>
- **FEMA—Volunteer & Donations Support Annex:** <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nrf/nrf-support-vol.pdf>
- **The Salvation Army—Ways to Give:** www.donate.salvationarmyusa.org/
- **National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster — “When Disaster Strikes Brochure”:** www.nvoad.org.
- **World Vision:** www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/give/gik-intro, or call 1.888.511.654