

Donations Management

SCOPE

Donations can overwhelm a community response. The saying that donations can become the secondary disaster is accurate. To avoid this situation, communities need to get in the forefront of this issue immediately following the disaster. Public information from the affected community should stress what the community needs and is willing to accept and how they will accept the donations. As the COAD develops their system to manage the donations, some of the questions that the COAD needs to ask when dealing with donations are:

- How will we handle cash donations?
- Will we handle donated goods?
- What is needed and when will it be used?
- Where will we store donated goods?
- How will we staff?
- How will we manage (record keeping, etc.) the donations?
- Who will oversee distribution?
- What equipment will we need to receive goods?
- Will we need to handle transportation of donated goods?
- Can donations be shared with other partners?
- What do we do with surplus or unneeded donations?

It is difficult to anticipate every need in a recovery program ahead of time. The COAD should immediately begin to think about long term needs of the community and create messaging to reflect these long term needs. The Donations Management Committee should collaborate and coordinate with the Long-Term Recovery Committee.

Examples of donations that could be needed during the recovery phase would include:

- Cash
- Building supplies
- Hand tools
- Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)

- Appliances
- Children supplies (formula, bedding, diapers, support equipment)
- Kitchen supplies
- Furniture and beds
- Professional construction related services (e.g. architects, structural engineers, electricians, HVAC specialists, etc.)

Warehousing and Distribution

In many cases the community's recovery effort may not require a large warehouse, although storage of unused building materials from construction sites will be needed. In a large donations program, a warehouse is used to receive bulk items and may serve as a staging area to sort and repackage supplies to be sent to a distribution center. The warehouse is not generally open to the public. Distribution centers are intended for clients to pick up supplies.

Warehousing

Depending on the size of the donations program or disaster, the COAD may find it necessary to operate a multi-agency or a state warehouse. Assuming that the community will have a need for a warehouse, there are numerous places the COAD can look in order to find donated space, beginning with the local emergency management agency (OEM), or the state or regional VOAD. Local OEM or COAD members may have relationships in place to secure space, such as with local businesses, local or state government, local realtors or investment companies. Some COADs may find warehouse space for free or reduced rent. When selecting a warehouse there are several issues to keep in mind:

- Location
- Access
- Size and configuration
- Operating costs including rent (if any), insurance and utilities
- Staffing needs

Distribution

Distribution centers are the points of contact with potential clients. Some distribution centers may resemble a thrift store. However, only families affected by the disaster are permitted to select and remove items for personal needs. Most distribution centers are only open during the response phase but may be open through the recovery depending on

need. Make sure the distribution center has easy access and is located near the disaster area. Remember, some potential clients may have lost their transportation and will be on foot.

The distribution center may be one of many places where the COAD makes contact with survivors who are in need. The COAD may consider having a Disaster Case Manager or disaster caseworker from a member organization at each distribution site to begin the disaster case management process. It is important to keep complete, confidential records of all survivors served and goods distributed.

Distribution center considerations include:

- Flexible hours of operation to accommodate survivors who continue working
- Staffing
- Bags and boxes for clients
- Equipment (carts, dollies, pallet jacks, etc.)
- Secure filing cabinet for confidential information

Distribution Centers vs. PODs

Distribution Centers and PODs (Points of Distribution) are two distinct operations that function in different phases of disasters but can resemble each other in some situations. PODs usually are set up immediately after a large disaster event in centralized locations where the public can pick up life sustaining commodities. These commodities usually include shelf stable food, water, ice and other items as needed. These PODs usually stay open and serve the public until certain parts of the community infrastructure are back up and running enough to support and sustain the food, water, and other needs as in normal times. Distribution centers are then set up in conjunction with the case management process providing for long term survivor needs.

Transportation

Liability issues surrounding transportation are always of great concern, but transportation is an essential part of warehousing. As decisions are made about transporting goods, keep in mind:

- Is your COAD insured to transport?
- Would a local trucking company donate services?
- Is there a local VOAD member with transportation equipment and experience?
- Do you have a file of licensed drivers with background checks?
- How will fuel cost be covered?

- When using a donated vehicle confirm proof of insurance, registration, and valid license plate.

Unsolicited donations

Remember, not all unsolicited donations will be needed. Numerous chapters could be written from the experience of COADs around the country about the agony of dealing with unnecessary items. COADs do need to be selective when receiving goods and determine if donated items are in good condition and whether they are new or used items.

It is okay to say, “No!”

Some general guidelines that apply to all donations:

- Provide a receipt for all donations
- Keep track of inventory
- Accept only appropriate donations
- Ask local media to appeal to the community for items needed
- Churches and vacant retail stores are great locations for distribution
- Make requests known to all disaster partners
- Consider carefully before accepting clothing. Suggest alternatives to clothing donors.
- Accept prepared foods only from commercial distributors. Be careful, local restaurants may try to get rid of food due to loss of refrigeration.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Local Emergency Management Agency
- Faith-Based Organizations
- American Red Cross
- The Salvation Army
- Local realtors association
- Chamber of Commerce

RESOURCES

NJVOAD and The State of New Jersey

www.Helpnjnow.org

National VOAD Training Resources Database: Long-Term Recovery When Rebuilding Is Involved Course <http://nvoad.eden.lsuagcenter.com/>