

# Emergency Response Operations

Instructional Manual for Programmatic Operations During an  
Emergency Response

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide instruction and recommendation on how a fund-based organization, such as a nonprofit or foundation, can **effectively engage with programmatic and operational activities around long-term emergency response and recovery**. For a broader overview, please visit the CDC Foundation's [Emergency Response Activation Instructional Handbook for Fundraising Organizations](#).

This manual provides a benchmark of processes and strategies in implementing a response to a public health emergency, which may help inform future work. These recommendations are based on a comprehensive review of the key takeaways and protocols that the CDC Foundation's Response Crisis and Preparedness Unit (RCPU) employed during its COVID-19 response.

The following are examples of processes and strategies of emergency response operations discussed throughout the manual:

- **Staffing considerations**
- **Preparing for emergency response activities** through:
  - Creating emergency response plans
  - Training emergency response staff
  - Creation of frameworks and templates
  - Establishing a fund for emergency response activities
- **Activating of emergency response activities** through:
  - Situation assessments
  - Issuing request for funding applications
  - Financial alignment
  - Scheduling project reporting
  - Data collection
  - Mitigating burnout
- **Ensuring smooth programming within emergency response activities** by:
  - Processing resource requests from implementing partners
  - Understanding implementing partners
  - Planning for project activities, including planning for monitoring and evaluation,
  - Agreement establishment,
  - Staffing of projects
  - Reporting back to donors in a timely and appropriate manner
- **Closing out emergency response activities** and ensuring sustainability beyond the emergency response.

This manual includes lessons learned that can be adapted for subsequent emergency responses.

# Overview

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## OVERVIEW: KEY PHASES

- **Preparedness:** Ensuring your organization is ready to respond in an emergency. This involves building plans for operations and staffing and creating an established platform of communications and technology, including the establishment of clear channels of communication.
- **Activation:** Ensuring quick and smooth shift into emergency response operation in your organization. A successful activation phase includes quick deployment of resources into the emergency response and the establishment of centralized metrics for program monitoring and evaluation.
- **Programming:** Working towards continued programmatic implementation through managing partnerships. This includes activities such as project set-up, planning, implementation and monitoring.
- **Close-out:** Discussions surrounding lessons learned and the creation of an after-action report.

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## OVERVIEW: KEY STAFFING POSITIONS

During an emergency response, having a multi-disciplinary emergency response team can streamline operations. This team can include staff members that have shifted roles during an emergency response or a team of individuals that are always designated specifically for emergency response. For example: the CDC Foundation's Response, Crisis and Preparedness Unit (RCPU) is an operational team within the organization even when emergency response mechanisms are not activated.

Below are our recommendations for both central and supporting roles that may be part of an emergency response:

### Central Emergency Response Roles

- **Programmatic leadership:** These individuals are responsible for providing overall activity coordination and management in order to meet objectives during an active emergency response. The programmatic unit may work collaboratively across the organization to deploy resources for programmatic activities, track the progress of activities and report to stakeholders; these positions will help lead that collaboration. *Example titles: Program Managers, Project Officers, Program Specialists*

- **Administrative leadership:** These individuals are responsible for documenting donor requirements, gathering impact, facilitating and coordinating meetings, and other project duties as assigned. *Example titles: Senior Program Services Coordinator, Staffing Team Lead*
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Positions:** These individuals are responsible for monitoring and evaluating project success by identifying key performance indicators at the onset of projects and tracking the project through input from program/project managers. Monitoring and evaluation leads are also responsible for writing up project impact evaluations. *Example titles: Emergency Response Monitoring & Evaluation Officer, Data Visualization Specialist, Emergency Response Specialist*

## Key Supporting Roles for Emergency Response

It is also critical to have cross-departmental support during emergency response activities. These may be members of your organization that operate outside of a designated emergency response team but act as the primary point of contact within their respective departments for collaborative emergency response activities:

- **Communications department:** Communications staff members are responsible for developing and disseminating messaging about the organizations' response activities and needs to a variety of audiences
- **Internal operations (Finance, HR, IT, etc.):** Internal Operations staff members are in charge of establishing internal processes and controls to ensure the organization is staffed accordingly and has processes in place to quickly mobilize funds raised for implementing partners via previously established mechanisms.
- **Fundraising/Advancement:** These staff members are in charge of mobilizing resources through a variety of strategies (institutional and individual giving, crowdfunding, online/direct mail, employee giving, etc.), gift review, reporting data integrity, and cause marketing.

# Key Programmatic Phases

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## PHASE 1: PREPAREDNESS

The focus of the preparedness phase should be making sure your organization is ready to respond in an emergency. This includes building plans for operations and staffing and creating an established platform of communications and technology. Before an emergency incident occurs, your organization should do the following:

- **Create an emergency response plan** including:
  - Staffing plan for individuals that will be activated or given additional roles during emergency response,
  - A communications plan to ensure efficient and timely information flow both internally and externally,
  - Processes for how and when organization will deploy funding and resources, build partnerships and programs, and evaluate programmatic successes, and
  - Prepare contingency plans and identification of capacity limits in emergency response activities to prevent and mitigate staff burnout. Succession planning for task rollover amongst team members can ensure continuity of response activities.
- **Prepare and provide easily-accessible onboarding training materials** to ensure any staffing expansions can be integrated into the response unit in an efficient and timely manner. This may include:
  - Establishing standard operating procedures for onboarding staff and delineating which onboarding roles and responsibilities are spearheaded by Human Resources versus the specific emergency response or supporting unit
  - Maintaining a single-location repository of onboarding materials in shared folders
- **Prepare and provide supplemental staff training** to those existing staff asked to perform additional roles during emergency response. We recommend that all programmatic staff members

take emergency response training in order to be prepared for any surge of work and shift of roles that may be necessary to maintain smooth operations.

- **Create and implement evaluation frameworks** such as a standardized project tracking database and financial obligations database. Make sure responsibilities for reporting and updating such databases are clearly defined.
  - Any project tracking database should ideally feature project index numbers, project title, assigned program lead, a concise summary, anticipated impacts, reported impacts, area of work, communities impacted, and appropriate metrics of project success.
- **Have a set of boilerplate documents and templates** for programmatic operations, such as requests for proposals, agreements, program reporting, logic models, and donor reports. Below is a list of potential templates you may need for emergency response operations:
  - Request for Funding applications
  - Proposals for Funding from prospective implementing partners
  - Progress Reports and Final Reports for implementing partners
  - Agreements and Memorandums of Understanding
  - Logic models for monitoring and evaluation
  - Any other forms or documents that may be used often during an emergency response
- **Establish a collaborative emergency response fund**, if within the scope of your organization, to enable quick mobilization of resources. For programmatic purposes, this fund will allow your organization to quickly deploy resources to your partner organizations.

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## PHASE 2: ACTIVATION

The focus of the activation phase is ensuring that the shift into emergency response operation occurs quickly and smoothly. A successful activation phase will allow for a quick deployment of resources into the emergency response.

1. **Perform a situation assessment** of the emergency to understand your organization's position in the response.
2. **Identify areas of programming for emergency response** to clearly define anticipated activities and identify high-level project planning.
3. **Start collecting data up front:** Before programs begin, it is important to establish a monitoring and evaluation plan to start documenting programmatic impacts up front. See [CDC's Framework for Program Evaluation](#) for assistance. We recommend you begin collecting data in the early stages of

program implementation, including: metrics on the program's overall impact, donor report needs, statistics versus data, stories that can be told, etc.

4. **Issue Applications for Funding Requests:** One way to begin the programmatic funding process is to issue a request for proposals (RFPs) to sub-grant funds you receive. Some examples of RFPs include applications for providers of products/services required for a program, or for organizations that wish to participate in a program. Budget, scope and metrics should be discussed by the program team. In discussing a project's scope, the following questions should be answered:
  - Why is this project important?
  - What are the project's deliverables/ intended solution?
  - Who is the audience of the project?
  - Who/what is your knowledge or expert source?
  - Is the project clearly defined with inputs and outputs?
  - What are both the short- and long-term priorities of the project?
  - What determines the success of the project?
  - What is the project timeline?
  - What are some potential complications that you should prepare for?
  - What are the project constraints?
5. **Alignment of Requests with Financials:** When preparing for funding projects, appropriate individuals within your organization should meet to discuss upcoming project obligations and review current donor money on hand. Include discussions around donor intent, approval and reporting to ensure it aligns with project timeline, scope, and type.
6. **Scheduling of Monitoring and Reporting:** Determine a timeline for when certain deliverables are due to the funder, and in turn, when deliverables are due to your organization. This timeline should account for review and report turnaround time. Deliverables may include products such as vignettes, progress reports, final reports, and financial reports. In some cases, these deliverables can be considered milestones for when tranches of payments will be provided to program implementers. (For example, upon agreement execution, the first tranche of money will be provided to the implementing partner; upon provision of progress and final reports, second and third tranches of money are respectively provided to implementing partners.)
7. **Preparing for Operational Sustainability During Emergency Response:** Depending on the length and potential intensity of the emergency response at hand, it is necessary that you prepare for volume and length of emergency response activities. This includes creating a plan to *mitigate burnout*:
  - **Encourage a clear work-life balance** through flexible schedules and boundaries between professional and personal life, particularly if remote work is necessary.

- **Reduce meeting requirements or offer modifications** for video during remote-work meetings and conferences. Provide options, such as walking meetings.
- **Implement specific communication and meeting-based guidelines** to help mitigate over-scheduling and allow time beyond meetings to get work done. These guidelines can include providing agendas for meetings and following up post-meeting with concise and manageable action items. Staff can also be encouraged to schedule time on viewable calendars for individual focus time, etc.
- **Encourage time off and mental health days** and provide strategies for stress management. Maintain open channels of communication by building trust with employees, empowering them to reach out for support.
- **Implement succession planning** and make sure it's being maintained and evaluated on a regular basis. This planning should monitor the workload of each staff member on your teams, and also provides contingency plans to ensure continuity of roles and responsibilities in the case that an employee encounters difficulty balancing their workload.

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## PHASE 3: IN-PROGRESS

### *Process and Procedures for In-Progress Programmatic Activities*

- 1. Getting Resource Requests:** One way in which foundations can receive information about potential projects is through resource requests from implementing partners. Upon receiving a resource request, the request should be reviewed for its expected effectiveness, financial reliability, etc. Approval should be reached in agreement with necessary organization leadership.
- 2. Evaluating Potential Partners:** When approving a program for funding, it is important to evaluate and understand any proposed implementing partners. The most important question about any proposed partner is their *capacity* to effectively implement their part of the project. What skills and knowledge do they need? What current capabilities, domain-specific expertise, track record of programmatic success and past partnership experiences exist for this organization? Asking these questions will help evaluate how your organization can best partner with and support the implementing partner and leverage its unique capabilities.
- 3. Aligning with Identified Partners:** Once a program partner is identified, meet to discuss your proposed partnership. The following topics should help decide whether the partnership is to be solidified:
  - Mutual interest
  - Capabilities and limitations of the partner
  - Project timeline based on donor requirements and scope of work
  - How existing partner relationships can be amplified and leveraged



4. **Project Planning:** Following project approval and donor alignment, discussions with the project subcontractor or grantee begin. During this time, you should discuss the project scope, budget, and metrics with the partner to understand their capacity. These items will be the project's main priorities during implementation.
5. **Establishing Monitoring and Evaluation Processes:** Once priorities for a project are established, identify specific activities and anticipated outcomes with your partnering organizations. For monitoring and evaluation purposes, the partner should be provided with a *logic model guide* ([see example below](#)) to facilitate discussions about objectives and outputs. You may want to require a completed logic model from any grantees and subcontractors. The shared understanding that results from creating a logic model is used to inform how monitoring and evaluation will take place throughout the duration of the project. Logic models should include **activities, outputs, outcomes and goals**.
- **Activities** are actions taken through which inputs are mobilized. They produce deliverables for which staff can be held accountable. Activities produce outputs:
  - **Outputs** are both tangible and non-tangible deliverables. They include products, goods, services and policy or procedure changes. Outputs aggregate to contribute to outcomes:
  - **Outcomes** are what the project expects to accomplish. This can be at the beneficiary or population level. Outcomes aggregate and help reach goals and long-term impact:
  - **Goals**, or long-term outcomes, are the highest-level desired end result to which the project contributes.

*Example logic model for monitoring and evaluation:*

<b>Name of program/project:</b>			
<b>Problem/Situation:</b> [Briefly] What is the issue or problem you are hoping to help solve with this program/project?			
<b>Main Strategies/Activities:</b> [Briefly] What are the activities or strategies you will undertake as part of this project to address the problem?			
<b>Simple Logic Model Table:</b> Please list the activities you will implement and the short-, mid- and longer-term outcomes you hope will result.			
Activities	Short-term Outcomes	Medium-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes/Impacts
<b>External Factors:</b> List any big outside factors that will influence whether or not your activities will successfully achieve your outcomes.			
1.			
2.			
3.			

**Evaluation Plan:** Indicate the key activities and outcomes you propose to measure to track implementation and effectiveness of the project. Also list the data source/collection method.

Activity A: [name]: [data source/collection method]

Activity B: [name]: [data source/collection method]

Outcome A: [name]: [data source/collection method]

Outcome B: [name]: [data source/collection method]

- **Establishing an Agreement between Organization and Implementing Partner:**

Once a project scope, budget and goals are agreed upon, a formal agreement should be drafted and signed by the appropriate parties involved.

- In the case that the partner later request an amendment to the agreement, first evaluate whether the amendment is justified and reasonable. The project lead will approve the amendment, referencing the following guidelines:
  - Ensure the scope of work is still in line with program priorities and set to meet project outcomes.
  - Ensure the extended end date will still satisfy donor reporting requirements if necessary
  - Determine whether additional funding is necessary

- **Staffing of Projects:** Determine in conversation with the partner whether additional staff might be needed to conduct the project, and if so, how many and what tasks they are needed for. Once you decide that a position is needed, the program lead should develop a position description.

- The hiring manager works with the program implementer to identify key skills to develop an interview guide for the position. When possible, the hiring manager will put together a panel to interview candidates.
- It is important in this phase to plan interviews with the following questions in mind:
  - Where will interviews take place and will they be in a virtual format?
  - Will there be more than one round of interviews, and if so, how many?
  - Who will conduct the interviews?
  - What questions will be asked and how will answers be evaluated against the key requirements and skills of the position?
- The hiring manager along with the panel will then interview (usually virtually) the employee, collate feedback, and select the candidate. Following this, the hiring manager will work with HR to extend and formalize the offer, as well as initiate onboarding requirements.

- Onboarding begins as soon as the new hire accepts the offer. It is important to work internally and coordinate with HR to determine the division of onboarding responsibilities and begin gathering documents as needed.
- **Documenting Programmatic Impact and Reporting Back to Donors:** During a program timeline, donors or funding organizations may require periodic reports. Use these reports to highlight the metrics you've been gathering so that you can best provide donors with transparency and an understanding of how their support effects successful interventions. To assist in the development of donor reporting, ideally you should have a foundation-setting session with grantees and partner organizations to quickly establish a few key points:
  - What overall questions will our storytelling need to answer?
  - Which key metrics are most appropriate to inform those answers?
  - What level of data capture and tracking is acceptable to both internal administrators and external project partners (e.g., being mindful of not overloading colleagues and partners with unsustainable or unnecessary administrative burden)?
  - What measures of accountability and methods of communication are acceptable to internal administrators and external project partners to ensure monitoring and evaluation timelines are met?
- **Emergency Response Progress Reviews**
  - In the case of large-scale and long-term emergency response, we recommend that you conduct in-progress reviews to bring team members together and collectively discuss operations. Focus on a SWOT analysis of your emergency response activities:
    - **S**trengths: things the unit does well and resources that are available
    - **W**eaknesses: skills or resources the unit lacks or is limited in
    - **O**pportunities/Suggestions: what the unit could change to further advance the mission
    - **T**hreats: unit-specific items that pose a risk to the organization's mission

As a final in-progress recommendation, consider distributing a survey across the organization about your emergency response operations. Then, in team meetings, departmental representatives can discuss and summarize the findings from the surveys. With each section of the survey, discuss specific strengths and weaknesses identified, and then develop actionable items to improve on for future responses.

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## PHASE 4: CLOSE-OUT

The focus of the close-out phase should be discussions on program sustainability, lessons-learned and the creation of an after-action report.

- **Items to Cover During Program Wrap-Up**

- Ensure there are designated roles for completing final reports and deliverables. Specifically, make sure that there is a chain of command guiding who should communicate with partners and who should communicate to the public. This includes having a clear understanding of when and how these communications should occur.
- Progress and final reports should include: an overall summary of grant administration, disbursement of funds used to support program goals, and alignment with the approved grant application.
- Consider writing *narrative summaries* or stories to summarize the program's impact throughout the entire funded time period. Narratives benefit from including photos that capture snapshots of the project's programmatic activities. Any photos included in reporting should have photo releases signed by the funding partner. See the section below on after-action reports for a guide to what narrative summaries should include.
- We recommend a stakeholder preparedness review. A stakeholder preparedness review is a suggested item on the FEMA Grant Management Technical Assistance closeout guide. It is a self-assessment of an organization's current capabilities in threat management, and how those capabilities have changed over the course of a project. It asks organizations to identify ways in which gaps in capabilities have been addressed.
- Compile final reports and deliverables and send them to all stakeholders that were involved in the response.
- Conduct internal debrief meeting(s) to include all departments engaged in the response to discuss lessons learned, conduct SWOT analysis, etc. Each unit may also conduct a team after-action meeting(s) focused on their specific roles and responsibilities.

- **Establishing Operational Sustainability After the Emergency Response**

- Critical to the institutional sustainability during project close is continuous ownership by key stakeholders, coupled with an adequate flow of financial resources to sustain program activities on an ongoing basis and enable future work. Key areas to consider may include items such as:
  - Strengthening communication activities to maintain public awareness of the ongoing threat of emergencies such as pandemics, hurricanes, and other potential causes for activation;
  - Sustaining disease surveillance, prevention and control activities, particularly in high-risk regions;
  - Strengthening country capacity to manage risk factors associated with the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases at national and local levels;

- Strengthening country capacity to implement effective strategies to control the spread and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and other zoonotic diseases from animals to the general population.
- **Emergency Response After-Action Reports:** After-Action Reviews are post-hoc structured reviews or debriefings by participants and those responsible for the project or event for analyzing what happened, why, and how it can be done better. Written plans should include an after-action report/improvement plan template, which must include the following elements:
  - Executive Summary
  - Event Overview
  - Event Summary
  - Analysis of Capabilities
  - Conclusion
  - Improvement plan, which includes:
    - Items of concern observed during response
    - Recommendation
    - Action Description