Emergency Response Activation

Instructional Handbook for Fundraising Organizations

2021

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide instruction and recommendation on how an organization can **effectively mobilize resources in preparation for and during long-term emergency response and recovery.** This document targets entities that engage in fundraising for operations and outreach, such as nonprofits and foundations.

OVERVIEW: KEY PHASES

- **Preparedness:** Ensuring 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.
- **Activation:** Ensuring that the shift into emergency response operation occurs quickly and smoothly. A successful activation phase will allow for a quick mobilization of funding and deployment of resources into the emergency response.
- **In-progress:** Working towards continued resource mobilization through institutional and individual donors. This includes maintaining relationships with previous donors and establishing partnerships with new donors.
- **Close-out:** Discussions surrounding lessons learned and the creation of an after-action report.

For more detail on these phases, see pages 3-7.

OVERVIEW: KEY STAFFING POSITIONS

- **Cross-departmental Emergency Response Team:** Establishing a cross-departmental emergency response team encourages collaboration and helps streamline communications. The following are examples of departments/groups that may be included in this team:
  - **Communications department:** Communications staff members could be responsible for developing and disseminating messaging about the organization's activities and needs to a variety of audiences and collaborate with internal partners (funding, implementing, etc.) to promote response activities.
  - **Internal Operations (Finance, HR, IT, etc.):** Internal Operations staff members could be 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.
  - **Fundraising/Advancement:** These staff members may be in charge of mobilizing resources through a variety of strategies (institutional and individual giving, crowdfunding, online/direct mail, employee giving, etc.), gift review, communications with liaisons, prospect research, acknowledgement dissemination, reporting, data integrity, and cause marketing.
  - **Implementation/Programmatic Unit:** These staff members may work cross-collaboratively across the organization to deploy resources for programmatic activities, track the progress of activities and report to stakeholders.

- **Board members**: If your organization has an advisory board or board of trustees, its members may be a valuable resource for mobilization of funds and other resources.
    - **Board Chair:** The board chair may have additional duties during emergency response activation as a key communicator and fundraiser. They may be approached for potential fundraising networks and act as a liaison between these networks and the organization. This individual is likely may be designated as point of contact between the organization and the board to streamline communications during response.
    - **Board committees:** It is recommended that board committees be established before emergency response for their value in regular business operations; in the case of emergency response, these committees may have additional tasks targeted to more urgent resource mobilization. This may include network outreach and resource review from potential funding sources that they have relationships with.
- **Liaison for any large partnerships:** If your organization engages in partnerships that can be leveraged for the emergency response, a point of contact for these partnerships should be designated. This includes partnerships with other nonprofits, non-governmental organizations, key community organizations and other key implementers. Additionally, volunteers may be mobilized to support response activities through fundraising, program implementation, sourcing and distributing in-kind goods and services, etc.

PHASE 1: PREPAREDNESS

The focus of the preparedness phase should be making sure that 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:

1. **Create an Incident Action Plan**; it is recommended that this IAP have two parts:
    - An internal business continuity plan that maintains staffing positions and tasks that will maintain normal operation during response.
    - An external emergency response plan including:
        - Staffing plan for individuals that will be activated or given additional roles during emergency response,
        - A communications plan to ensure continuous conversations *and*
        - Processes for how and when organization will perform donor stewardship, maintain funding throughout response and deploy funding and resources
2. **Prepare and provide supplemental staff training** to those asked to perform additional roles during emergency response.
3. **Create a set of templates and boilerplate documents** to allow for quick mobilization of resources once emergency response activation occurs. This should include but is not limited to templates for: agreements, proposals, communications with donors/stakeholders, etc.
4. **Ensure technological platforms are set up to maintain unified communications** between all staff members. For example, the CDC Foundation utilizes Salesforce as a platform that connects all departments within the organization and all online giving systems.
5. If within the scope of your organization, it is recommended you **establish a collaborative emergency response fund to enable quick mobilization of resources.** The purpose of this fund will depend on the mission of your organization and its relationship to emergency response. The following should be identified in creation of this fund:
    - Potential funding partners to provide initial resources, as well as potential fundraising networks.
    - Parameters of the fund such as giving targets, donors, disbursement criteria, etc.
    - Mechanisms of giving to the fund including giving platforms and/or crowdfunding partnerships.
6. **Recommended: have an emergency response expert on staff or on call**. If the scope of your organization already includes responding to emergencies, having such an individual on staff may be most useful. If the scope of work of your organization does not include emergency response but you plan to temporarily expand your scope, having an emergency response expert on call is recommended.
    - At the CDC Foundation, the Crisis Preparedness and Response Unit is an operational team within the organization, even when emergency response mechanisms are not activated. This unit is responsible for implementing emergency response activities, managing response budget/s, establishing and overseeing implementing partner relationships, managing donor reporting and more.

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 mobilization of funding and deployment of resources into the emergency response.

1. **Perform a situation assessment** of the disaster to understand your organization's position in the response.
2. **Create cross-departmental emergency response task force** and activate related key staff positions.
   - Set up regular debriefings/meeting with emergency response task force
   - Create a listserv of emergency response task force staff for consolidated communications
   - Ensure chain of command is operational and all necessary positions are filled and/or can be quickly staffed
3. **Review after-action reports and results of past emergency responses** within your organization to brief on the lessons learned and potential areas of improvement.
4. **Ensure that your funding mechanisms are prepared to take in opportunities for emergency response.** This may involve setting up a unique fund designated for emergency response in order to provide clear opportunity designation.
5. **Determine your solicitation strategy.**[5]
   - During an emergency response, the goal is to mobilize resources as quickly and efficiently as possible while maintaining trust with donors. Creating simple 'giving goals' for donors (I.e. $25, $50, $100) streamlines giving mechanisms and provides clear explanation for the purpose of donated funds. For example, mention that '$25 can provide x number of necessary items for x amount of time.' Establishing simple giving goals will also assist in creating a clear and concise fundraising plan.
   - Utilizing the established simple giving points, emergency response team should collaborate on solicitation mechanisms including email content, frequency of emails and social media correspondence.
6. **Begin communication with prospective donors.**
   - Reach out to any donors who have prepositioned funding to determine if funds can be released for the current response effort. Such funds can be leveraged in early communications about activation to show other prospective donors that partners are already on board.
   - Look to previous response donors as prospects. Early outreach to prospects may cover broad categories of needs seen in past responses, i.e. surge staffing, supplies and equipment, travel, etc.
   - Activate other parties to fundraise on your behalf, e.g. board members, business partners, corporate partners, or private sector partners. These partnerships should be developed during the planning phase of emergency response.
7. **Start collecting data up front:** the overall impact, any reporting on the impact, reporting out to donors, statistics versus data, stories that can be told, etc.

PHASE 3: IN-PROGRESS

The focus of the in-progress phase is to work towards continued resource mobilization through institutional and individual donors. This includes maintaining relationships with previous donors and establishing partnerships with new donors.

1. **Conduct regular debriefings** with emergency response team to discuss rate-limiting steps and accelerators. Additionally, maintain constant communication with organizational leadership and other stakeholders.
2. **Adjust key staff positions as needed.** This is especially important if you begin to develop new methods of reaching out to both institutional and individual donors.
3. **Mobilize and develop relationships** with key private, corporate and philanthropic partners to secure financial and in-kind opportunities. Utilizing the templates developed during the planning phase, create opportunity records for each partnership. This includes agreements, financial documentation, and any related reports. Throughout the emergency response, ensure that clear funding opportunity records are maintained across all departments and perform data cleaning continuously.
4. **If able, segment your giving population.** Segmentation of donors can be performed in variety of ways, including by giving capacity, donor type (organization versus individual) and/or donor interest. One way to perform segmentation is through survey via email communication with donors after they give. In the case that you are receiving large volumes of donations and/or support from a variety of donors, create communication materials that are specific to different segments of your giving population. These segmented communications encourage donors to give more by providing impact statements targeted to their giving capacity, interests, etc. This segmentation allows for streamlined donor communication in the future, specifically outside of emergency response operations.
5. **Explore giving opportunities** in areas such as cause marketing, internal and/or external crowdfunding, matching gifts, workplace giving, challenge grants and government funding. During the course of a response effort, your organization may have the opportunity to apply for government funding. If awarded, government funding may supplement emergency activities funded through public-private donations.
6. **Document impact reports and stories** from the start of emergency response. All donors who opt in should be included in subsequent emails and updates about how emergency responses funds are being deployed. Regularly communicate impact through newsletters, social media, etc. If donors are segmented by interests, communicating impact based on said interests is another means of encouraging more giving and maintaining transparency.

PHASE 4: CLOSE-OUT

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

During close-out of a response, your organization should:

1. **Ensure there are designated staffing roles** for the completion of final reports and deliverables. Make sure that there is a chain of command for who should communicate with partners, and who should communicate with the public. This includes having a clear understanding of when and how these communications should occur.
2. **Create templates for general donor reports** (institutional and individual donors). General reports can be modified for donors or partners that require specific reporting. Reports should include an overview of response activities, evaluation metrics, final budget overviewing how funds were expended, etc.
3. **Ensure all contacts are recorded in your donor database**, such as Salesforce.
4. **Conduct internal debrief meeting(s)** to include all departments engaged in response (Communications, Internal Operations, Programs, etc.) to discuss lessons learned, conduct SWOT analysis, etc. Fundraising/Advancement may also conduct a team after-action meeting(s) focused on stewardship and building relationships with new partners
5. **Additionally, consider how donor recognition can serve your stewardship strategies.** Strategies could include creating awards for large-scale donors, utilizing communication materials such as ads to thank a wide audience and/or creating recognition events to thank donors and promote positive impact. It is recommended that a small percentage of flexible, unrestricted emergency response funds be set aside for donor recognition activities and/or events.

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