**Disaster Response**

**Coordinator**

**Training Manual**

**Table of Contents**

**Introduction** **3**

**Letter from Your Coalition Leader 4**

**Houston Responds Coalitions 5**

**Coalition Contact Information 7**

**Coalition Overview 8**

**Coalition Map 9**

**Purpose** **10**

**Biblical Foundation for Disaster Response 11**

**Serving the Mission of Your Congregation 13**

**The Essential Role of the DRC 14**

**Before Disaster** **15**

**Preparing Your Congregation to Respond 16**

**DRC’s Tasks Before a Disaster 17**

**Common Disaster-Related Needs & Ways to Serve 18**

**Resources & Training 19**

**Disaster Response Ministry 20**

Ministry Team Roles & Responsibilities 21

Building a Team 22

Team Gatherings 24

**Building Partnerships 25**

**During & After Disaster** **27**

**Mobilizing Your Congregation to Respond 28**

**DRC’s Tasks During & After a Disaster 28**

**Mobilization Scenarios 30**

**Disaster Communication 31**

**Coordinating Volunteers 32**

**Introduction**

Dear Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC),

We would like to personally thank you for signing up for this vital role within your congregation. With your help, the *Willing & Able* Congregational Disaster Readiness Program will unite congregations to collaborate for a more effective response to disasters. We look forward to serving our disaster-affected neighbors together with you.

I want to emphasize how your role as the disaster response coordinator (DRC) is essential to executing a coordinated response to disaster. You will serve as the “liaison” between your congregation and **Coalition Name**.

Please take the time to read through this training manual. We are not asking you to become a disaster expert or re-create new procedures, policies, etc. If you are simply *willing & able* to learn and implement a few disaster readiness-related tools, this manual should provide all the information you need to succeed as a DRC.

We encourage you to provide feedback on our training methods, this manual, and other tools you might receive throughout the process. For questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us. May God richly bless you and your team with favor and wisdom as you walk through this process.

Sincerely,

**Coalition Coordinator Name**

**Houston Responds Coalitions**

Your coalition is part of a larger collective of disaster response coalitions throughout the Greater Houston area called Houston Responds. Its mission is to unite, empower, and mobilize churches across Greater Houston to expedite long-term recovery, respond to community crises, and prepare for future disasters. Houston Responds facilitates communication, coordination, and collaboration between congregations that make up coalitions like yours, so they can focus on what they do best: loving God and loving their neighbors, especially those in need.

**Coalition Shared Principles**

Houston Responds coalitions have developed and agreed upon the following shared principles to guide the work they do in their communities.

**How We Work with Congregations**

1. **Volunteers: Prioritizing engagement of congregational volunteers in sustainable transformational disaster response ministry.** Local congregations are well-positioned to know their neighbors’ needs, uniquely called to care compassionately, and sufficiently numerous to provide a volunteer engine that drives effective recovery.
2. **Congregations: Expanding the number and type of congregations participating in disaster and crisis response.** Effectively reaching and reflecting the broad spectrum of communities in Greater Houston requires intentionally connecting and uniting congregations that span the theological, denominational, ethnic, and socioeconomic spectrum.
3. **Representation: Striving to reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic demographics of the community.** Effectively reaching and reflecting the diversity of our city requires engaging a broad spectrum of congregations and intentionally securing Houston Responds and coalition leadership that reflects the ethnic and socioeconomic character of our communities.
4. **Resiliency: Developing community resiliency through sustainable local disaster response coalitions.** Meeting the current needs of families in crisis and developing systems and processes that stand the test of time and inevitable future disasters requires building disaster response coalitions that are organized, funded, staffed, and in it for the long haul.

**How We Work with Communities**

1. **Partnership: Gratefully working together with all other faith communities and organizations involved in disaster and crisis response.** Developing a coordinated community response means working together with long-term recovery groups, other agencies, and all faith-based and non-faith-based organizations involved in disaster recovery.
2. **Inclusivity: Serving all families in crisis, without discrimination.** Fulfilling the mission of loving our neighbors means gratefully and enthusiastically assisting any and all families in crisis regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background.
3. **Stewardship: Using resources to meet needs and close recovery gaps without duplication.** To wisely steward disaster recovery resources, Houston Responds coalitions prioritize meeting the needs of under-resourced families in crisis and filling gaps in a community’s disaster recovery efforts while avoiding duplication of efforts.
4. **Integrity: Meeting needs with the highest degree of care, quality, and efficiency possible.** Houston Responds coalitions are committed to faithfully and lovingly caring for people in crisis; seeing every readiness, relief, and recovery effort to completion; and operating with honesty, transparency, and accountability.

**How Houston Responds and Coalitions Work Together**

1. **Cooperation: Relating and functioning synergistically with other coalitions.** Rather than building isolated and wholly independent operations, coalitions benefit individually and collectively by sharing needs, resources, knowledge, and best practices. Houston Responds seeks to facilitate this cooperation.
2. **Collectivity: Working together and representing one another as part of a whole.** Each coalition represents, supports, and communicates with congregations within a designated geographical area. They may serve their designated area and other areas in partnership with other coalitions. Beyond their designated area, coalitions represent Houston Responds and present themselves as part of the collective working in partnership with other coalitions. Houston Responds identifies itself as the collective of coalitions and represents the coalitions.
3. **Boundaries: Identifying and respecting the coalitions’ geographical and relational boundaries.** Houston Responds and the coalitions encourage congregations in other coalition areas to participate in their nearest coalition. Within Greater Houston, coalitions operate in another coalition’s designated area in partnership with that coalition and as a representative of the Houston Responds collective. Houston Responds works with coalitions, as needed, to identify or revise coalition designated areas and service areas.
4. **Relationships: Respecting, trusting, and proving trustworthiness to one another.** In keeping with Biblical values, HR and coalition staff and leaders agree to assume positive intent, speak well of one another, treat others as they would like to be treated, build one another up in love, address issues privately before publicly, and celebrate our differences with a commitment to unity.

**Coalition Contact Information**

**Interim Coalition Coordinator**

**Coalition Leader Name**

**PHONE:**

**EMAIL:**

**Website**

www.houstonresponds.org/**Page**

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**Coalition Overview**

**About Us**

[Coalition] is a local disaster response coalition of congregations in the [Coalition] area. It is one of approximately 20 such coalitions across Greater Houston supported by Houston Responds.

**Mission**

To unite, empower, and mobilize congregations in the [Coalition] area to expedite long-term recovery, respond to community crises, and prepare for future disasters.

**Vision**

Establish a sustainable disaster response coalition of 30 to 50 congregations willing and able to respond to disaster and walk every disaster-affected neighbor through recovery in the [Coalition] area.

**Goals**

* Engage 30 to 50 congregations in the *Willing & Able* program.
* Identify and train disaster response coordinators in participating congregations.
* Train participating congregations in their chosen area of disaster response.
* Establish ongoing regular communications with DRCs and their congregations.
* Form a functioning Coalition Advisor Team.
* Put volunteer coalition coordinator(s) in place.
* Establish a plan for the coalition’s financial and organizational sustainability.

**DRC Meeting Schedule**

Meeting Schedule

**Coalition Map**

**Insert Map**

**Purpose**

**Biblical Foundation for Disaster Response**

Hurricane Harvey left in its wake the largest housing disaster in American history. It was a human disaster as well, from which many are still recovering. During recovery, the disasters and crises have continued, whether it was Tropical Storm Imelda, a local chemical plant explosion, or the COVID-19 pandemic. As in past disasters, many congregations have responded and continue to respond as a simple expression of love for their neighbor. Their response in cooperation with others is an expression of our unity and a realization that we are, and we serve, better together.

**Here are three reasons we believe congregations should respond in disaster:**

1. **It’s Biblical**

As Proverbs says, “the prudent see danger and take refuge” (Prov. 27:12) and “a wise person thinks ahead” (Prov. 13:16). Biblical characters practiced what Proverbs preaches. When the flood came, Noah was prepared – with a boat. When famine hit Egypt, Joseph was prepared – with a storehouse of grain. When, in a story Jesus told, a man on the road is robbed, beaten and left half-dead, a Samaritan passerby is prepared – with ointment, bandages, transportation, and enough money to buy the man a room at an inn. Preparing, it seems, is part of being Biblical people, part of being a blessing when disaster strikes.

1. **It’s Essential**

When disaster strikes any man, what does he need? According to Jesus, a neighbor is someone who cares enough to stop and inquire and offers what he has to help. The same is true of today’s disaster response. What is missing? What is the hole? Neighbors who care enough to stop and inquire, and who are willing and able to help. We call this a God-shaped hole. Why? Given that our greatest commandment is to love God and love our neighbors, this is a hole God’s people are designed to fill. And we must fill it. In the wake of our response to Harvey, Imelda, and now COVID-19, the needs are great, and hurricane season is always coming. Disaster response agencies bring tremendous resources but cannot do it alone. Who would be better to connect those resources with those in need other than local congregations that know and love their neighbors?

1. **It’s Transformational**

When disasters strike, they take a heavy human toll. In addition to the physical, financial, and medical challenges, disaster survivors often feel discouraged, depressed, and disconnected from their community and even from God. When volunteers from local congregations show up, to repair a home, provide food or masks, or simply to care and pray with compassion, they provide a powerful reminder that God still loves us, and God’s people do, too. It’s the kind of love that can bring healing, hope, and transformation. Disaster response not only restores homes, it can restore hearts and relationships with people and with God. It can be transformational, not only for the disaster survivor but also for those who serve and for their congregations. Volunteers step up, leaders emerge, and we discover new ways to love, as God first loved us.

As a disaster response coalition leader has said, “Disaster response ministry is a truly unique opportunity to love our neighbors in ways that would otherwise not have been possible. It builds bridges. It opens doors into homes, families, and communities in ways we could never have imagined.”

That is the blessing of disaster response ministry. It can transform receivers, givers, congregations, and entire communities, and be witness to the gracious love of God.

While no one would wish for Harvey, Imelda, COVID-19, or any other disaster, they provided amazing opportunities to give and receive God’s blessings.

**Don’t waste your disaster!**

**Serving the Mission of Your Congregation**

When Hurricane Harvey hit in 2017, countless congregations across Greater Houston did what came naturally they sprang into action. Untold numbers of volunteers gave immeasurable amounts of time, talent, and resources to love and serve their disaster-affected neighbors. Congregations eventually began working together, which does not always happen naturally. They shared resources and best practices and combined efforts to serve their communities better. As a result, local congregations formed several disaster response coalitions.

**What is a disaster response coalition?** It is an organization of congregations that helps their local community or region respond to disaster together.

**How do they accomplish this?** Through communication, coordination, and collaboration.

**Communication**

For effective disaster response, communication is perhaps the most essential element. When congregations are in regular communication with one another, both before and during a disaster, they can more effectively share needs and resources and mobilize volunteers to serve their community.

**Coordination**

Coordinated disaster response efforts can help avoid duplication of efforts and optimize the support being provided. Disaster response coalitions work with congregations, other local disaster agencies, and nonprofits to ensure a coordinated response.

**Collaboration**

Congregations working together are more than the sum of their parts. As part of a collaborative community, congregations can identify needs and creatively arrive at solutions.

**The Essential Role of the DRC**

Disaster response coordinators (DRCs) plays an essential role in a coordinated response. The DRC serves as the liaison between your congregation and your local disaster response coalition. There are two primary functions involved in the role of the DRC:

1. **Communication:** The DRC is the point of contact between your coalition and congregation.

* Receives and responds to communication from your coalition
* Shares relevant information with your congregation’s leadership
* Participatesin coalition conference calls or meetings with other DRCs
1. **Coordination:** The DRC ensures your congregation’s participation in disaster response.
* Arranges the training of volunteers (provided by your coalition)
* Coordinates a process for your congregation’s volunteers to serve
* Forms a congregation disaster response ministry team if needed

Whether the DRC is a congregational staff person or layperson, it will be important for this person to be clearly designated as your DRC and understand how the role is fulfilled. Without a designated and active DRC, communication may break down, and coordination can become difficult, or the responsibility may fall to staff leaders without the bandwidth to fulfill the role.

Beyond regular coalition meetings, the DRC role depends primarily on how the congregation decides to serve and the DRC’s leadership style. Whether the DRC is more doer or delegator will largely shape the position and the time and talent required.

**Before Disaster**

**Preparing Your Congregation to Respond**

The best time to prepare for disaster is before it strikes. We suggest that you meet with the appropriate congregational leaders to hear their vision for your congregation’s role in disaster response, and then begin thinking about the resources and team members you will need.

As you prepare to lead your congregation in responding to disaster, please know you will not have to lead alone. Your disaster response coalition will help with identifying how your congregation will serve your community, and with training and equipping your volunteers.

The *Willing & Able* Disaster Congregational Disaster Readiness Program outlines three key steps for congregations to take in getting ready to respond to disaster. If you are training to be a DRC, your congregation has most likely already taken the first two steps.

1. **Willing to Respond to Disaster:** Affirm you are *Willing & Able* to respond to disaster and connect with their local disaster response coalition.
2. **Able to Be in Communication:** Designate a disaster response coordinator (DRC) to enable open communication with between your congregation and your local disaster response coalition.
3. **Ready to Respond When Disaster Strikes:** Prepare your congregation to respond by determining how your congregation will serve when disaster strikes. Your local disaster response coalition can help you get ready.

**Determine How Your Congregation Will Respond**

Congregations typically identify how they will serve as they would with any other ministry. It may be helpful to do so in conversation with other congregations and coalition participants to develop a coordinated strategy and to avoid inefficient duplication of efforts in the community. Your local disaster response coalition can provide guidance and training.

*Willing & Able* congregations serve where they are led. They typically respond first in their local community, then their county, then the Greater Houston area. Houston Responds and the network of disaster response coalitions help to facilitate collaborative efforts.

The way you serve is up to each congregation. Some considerations may include a congregation’s previous experience, sense of calling, available resources, volunteer skills, anticipated needs in the community, and how other congregations are serving. Your local disaster response coalition helps to assess and communicate these needs and resources collectively.

**DRC’s Tasks Before Disaster**

Below are examples of typical ways DRCs function in their role prior to a disaster.

**Communication**

* Confer with congregation leadership about decisions that need to be made before the next disaster.
* Communicate with coalition leadership about those decisions.
* Talk with other DRCs to gather ideas, share experiences, and grow together.
* Share opportunities to serve, train, and prepare with volunteers.

**Organization**

* Collect information for presenting to congregation leaders and volunteers.
* Coordinate volunteers for team building and serving together.
* Gather needed resources.

**Inspiration**

* Motivate current volunteers to grow in their preparation and service
* Encourage potential new participants to consider a new opportunity to grow and serve

**Empowerment**

* Galvanize disaster response ministry team leadership by developing relationships, understanding gifts and skills, and providing opportunities to lead.
* Engage volunteers by inviting participation on the team, identifying gifts, skills and roles, and creating opportunities to serve.

**Growth**

* Develop personally by acquiring practical and relational skills for effective leadership
* Grow collectively as a team by deepening relationships, clarifying vision, and sharing responsibility.

**Common Disaster-Related Needs & Ways to Serve**

How your congregation serves depends on several factors, such as anticipated needs and available resources, including the interests and skills of volunteers, existing local disaster agencies, and potential partners in the community. Your local coalition helps to assess and communicate these needs and resources collectively.

**COVID-19 Response**

Common ways congregations are currently responding:

* Food distribution
* Mask production and distribution
* Financial support
* Planning for safe congregational reopening

**Hurricane Readiness**

Common ways congregations are preparing to serve:

* Compassionate care
* Volunteer coordination
* Sheltering
* Clean-up
* Mucking and gutting
* Supply distribution
* Laundry services
* Transportation
* Non-emergency medical support

**Local Disaster Agencies, Nonprofits and Potential Partners**

Rather than duplicate efforts, your coalition seeks to maximize support from others and fill gaps when and where needed. Some examples of potential partners:

* County Long-Term Recovery Committee
* County Office of Emergency Management
* Food Bank

**Resources & Training**

Houston Responds Resources is a knowledge base website with disaster response resources for congregations and coalitions. Our goal is to provide practical resources through a user-friendly platform to help coalitions and their congregations prepare for disaster and respond during a disaster. Resources are added frequently. All resources allow for feedback regarding their usefulness, so please provide your feedback and let us know of any additional resources you recommend adding to the site.

**www.houstonresponds.org/resources**

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**Disaster Response Ministry**

Whether your congregation is just beginning or expanding a disaster response ministry, it promises to be a transformational experience. Disaster response ministry provides a unique opportunity to love our neighbors in ways that would otherwise not have been possible. It builds bridges. It opens doors into homes, families, and communities in ways we could never have imagined. That is the blessing of disaster response ministry. It can transform receivers, givers, congregations, and the entire community while witnessing God’s gracious love. While no one would wish for any disaster, they come and bring with them an amazing opportunity to give and receive God’s blessing.

A disaster response ministry team is a small group of people who seek to serve the Lord and their congregation’s leadership by helping to prepare the congregation for disaster response and to lead the response when crisis comes. As with other ministry teams, no one person can do it all. It takes a variety of people with complementary gifts and skills for successful disaster response. Volunteers are typically more effective and more likely to continue serving when they are part of a cohesive team.

**Ministry Objectives**

* Pray together.
* Build your ministry team.
* Develop a plan for your team.
* Consult with your congregation’s leadership.
* Serve together.
* Share leadership opportunities.
* Grow together, spiritually.
* Identify new volunteers.
* Strengthen and empower existing volunteers.
* Become personally prepared for disaster.

**How Do You Start?**

* Identify team roles.
* Identify potential volunteers already engaged with community outreach.
* Personally invite individuals to join the team.
* Host a disaster response informational meeting for your congregation.
* Host a volunteer gathering, share the vision, and invite participants to consider serving on the disaster response ministry team.

**Ministry Team Roles & Responsibilities**

The goal of a disaster response ministry team is to equip volunteers from your congregation to be ready to serve during the next disaster. Each team may look different depending on the number of members. Below are some suggested roles.

**Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC):** The DRC serves as the liaison between your congregation and your local disaster response coalition. The DRC attends regular coalition DRC meetings and keeps your congregation’s leadership informed about disaster response needs, resources, opportunities to serve, etc. The DRC leads regular meetings for your congregation’s disaster response ministry team.

**Co-Coordinator:** The co-coordinator collaborates with the DRC to make decisions, assists in the fulfillment of DRC responsibilities, acts as the lead DRC in the DRC’s absence, and performs any administrative duties not assigned to an individual.

**Prayer Leader:** The prayer leader supports and encourages the spiritual growth of the team. This role leads the team in prayer during meetings and regularly prays for the team.

**Resource Coordinator:** The resource coordinator identifies any needed equipment and supplies and shares the information with the team. This role maintains an inventory of supplies and donated items. If applicable, the resource coordinator organizes the planning and execution of shelter during a disaster and manages supply distribution for your congregation and/or coalition.

**Volunteer Coordinator:** The volunteer coordinatorrecruits and organizes your congregation’s volunteers as needed during a disaster.

**Preparedness Coordinator:** The preparedness coordinator works to ensure your congregation is informed and taking steps to prepare its families for disaster. This role leads preparedness training for your congregation and assists in preparing and executing your congregation’s emergency response plan.

**Recruiter:** The recruiter cultivates potential volunteers and shares information about disaster response volunteer opportunities within your congregation and the community in partnership with your disaster response coalition.

**Building a Team**

Effective ministries are usually led by effective leadership teams. They may still struggle with challenges, but they work together to find solutions. Every individual on your volunteer team plays an important role. Every task someone completes contributes to your team’s overall success and your ability to provide service to others. If you do not have much experience working with teams, do not worry. You can learn the skills you need to build a strong team, in which you and the team can grow together.

**10 Steps to Building a Great Team**

1. **Make a Plan**
* Clarify mission, vision, and values as needed.
* Define what team members are expected to do.
1. **Establish Clear Team Objectives and Expectations**
* Document goals and objectives and make them easily accessible to the team.
* Divide larger objectives into smaller, more manageable ones.
* Make goals SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound).
1. **Communicate Effectively**
* Identify the preferred mode of communication for the team (call, email, text, etc.).
* Make documentation accessible (share files, etc.).
* Encourage teammates to communicate regularly.
1. **Make Decisions and Set Priorities**
* Ask for input and feedback from teammates when decisions are made.
* Set priorities, as there will always be more than we are able to do.
1. **Assess Your Team’s Skillsets**
* Know yourself and your teammates and delegate to those best be able to complete the task.
* Provide more or less guidance as needed by teammates.
* Pay close attention to the needs of team members as disaster response can be stressful and draining.
1. **Create a Vision for Success**
* Believe in your team and its objectives.
* Eliminate barriers.
* Keep the end in mind and the main thing the main thing.
1. **Lead by Example**
* Be positive, clear, and consistent.
* Coach and encourage your team as needed.
1. **Show Your Team You Care About Them**
* Learn about your teammates and chat with them regularly.
* Affirm, listen, and empathize.
* Resolve conflicts quickly as they arise.
* Address any anxieties with a calm presence.
1. **Facilitate Others’ Successes**
* Affirm team members in public and address issues in private.
* Build one another up, and they will build you up as well.
1. **Have Fun Together!**

It’s been said that 95% of effective disaster response is relationship*s*. Get to know your teammates and build stronger relationships with them. Share a meal, create a group chat, do a ropes course – do whatever works. Cultivate regular healthy communication with your fellow volunteers and maintain a positive environment. Laugh together, cry together, pray together, and celebrate together!

While responding to disasters can be stressful, it can also be a fulfilling time of serving, caring for, and enjoying one another.

**Team Gatherings**

You are building a team, which is like a family. Your relationships are as important as the content you cover. Developing meaningful and trusting relationships will help members prioritize the team and its task and feel that their contribution is significant. It also builds sustainable; as has been said, “vision may bring people to the table, but relationships will keep them there.”

**Recommendations for Gathering as a Team**

**Time & Location**

* Meet for one to two hours to allow ample time for relational connections, working through the content, and praying together.
* Share a meal to facilitate the deepening of relationships.
* Meet in a home to foster deeper bonding even if the congregation’s facilities are available.

**When People Arrive**

* Give everyone a warm welcome.
* Provide a comfortable atmosphere, possibly including music, snacks, icebreakers, etc.

**Initial Connection** (This could happen during the meal.)

* Share testimonies of God’s work in team members’ lives both related and unrelated to disaster response ministry.
* Share challenges to cultivate transparency, empathy, and prayerfulness.
* Pray together to develop powerful (Matt.18:19) and deeper spiritual connections.

**Vision, Direction, Objectives**

* Share the vision.
* Review the content of meetings and answer questions.
* Identify action items from the meeting and assign them to team members.

**Building Partnerships**

Building partnerships with other community organizations can create opportunities for your congregation to serve. Establishing a culture for serving outside the walls of the congregation within the community helps keep congregations engaged and accustomed to serving outside of a disaster. When congregations are actively engaged in serving their community, they are better prepared to respond during and after a disaster.

Here are a few recommendations on how you can find local community organizations and form strong partnerships with nonprofits and charities already doing great work in your community.

**1. Ask Individuals Within Your Congregation for Recommendations**

Even if your congregation does not have an official partnership with a charity or a nonprofit, some members may already volunteer with charitable organizations and can help get you connected. For example, members who regularly volunteer at a soup kitchen or a food pantry may be able to introduce you to the agency’s leaders to talk about working together. This may lead to an informal or formal relationship in which your congregation mobilizes volunteers to support that agency’s disaster response through donating food, funds, or distribution.

**2. Do Online Research on Nonprofits in Your Area**

 A simple internet search can help you find local charities and nonprofits. You may find helpful search tools like GuideStar, [www.guidestar.com](http://www.guidestar.com/), which has a full directory of more than 1.8 million IRS-recognized charities and nonprofits. You can search by category and find nonprofits in your area doing disaster response work that your congregation can support.

Examples of nonprofits you might search:

* After-school youth programs
* Soup kitchens and food banks/pantries
* Homeless shelters
* Drug recovery and rehabilitation organizations
* Tutoring and educational support organizations
* Support for domestic violence and abuse survivors
* Environmental organizations
* Halfway homes and post-prison rehabilitation centers
* At-risk youth support organizations

Take some time to think about your congregation, your resources, and your vision for transforming your community to help select organizations that best align with your congregation. Then, begin exploring partnerships with these organizations.

**3. Reach Out to Nearby Public Schools**

Public schools provide an excellent opportunity for your congregation to serve, especially in under-resourced areas. Each school will have different needs. We recommend that you and/or an appropriate congregation staff person consult with a school’s superintendent, principal, or school board member to learn more about their needs and challenges and to explore the possibility of partnership.

For example, if a school needs school supplies, organize a supply drive for parents to donate backpacks, notebooks, and other school essentials for students in need.

**4. Network with Other Ministers and Congregational Leaders**

If you are struggling to find an organization to support or to mobilize enough volunteers to help with a project, consider reaching out to other local congregational leaders, pastors, and ministers. If they already partner with local organizations, you may be able to partner with them, bringing even more volunteers and/or financial support to maximize the organization’s effectiveness.

**5. Contact Local Hospitals and Extended Care Facilities**

Medical facilities, nursing homes, and other similar organizations are often willing to work with faith-based organizations. Congregations often volunteer to visit and care for residents or to help with the maintenance of buildings and grounds.

Another great way to serve your local community is to organize a health screening at your location. This can be especially helpful if you are located in an area that lacks medical resources or has many residents unable to afford adequate health insurance or care.

You can work with a local hospital to set up a basic health screening facility and invite members of both the congregation and larger community. It could even turn into a long-term partnership with annual events.

**Do some research and start planning your next partnership!**

**During** **&** **After Disaster**

**Mobilizing Your Congregation to Respond**

A disaster may strike with or without warning. In the moments, hours, and days surrounding a disaster, the concern is safety and preservation of life. Those affected by disaster seek temporary relief and assistance – often provided by the Red Cross and Salvation Army.

Local police, civil emergency, and defense forces are often strained to carry out their tasks. They appreciate the support and partnership of local congregations to help survivors deal with the reality of danger and guide them to assistance. Before doing anything, check with the local disaster response coalition to determine what is needed.

Don’t just go! Unexpected or uncoordinated volunteers can often add to the problem. Offer to send volunteer work teams as they are needed and can be scheduled. Volunteers are often needed to assist with clean up, debris removal, and preparation of meals for volunteers. Skilled volunteer construction workers are always a critical long-term recovery need.

Don’t send “stuff!” Clothing, furniture, and other “stuff” often cause major problems for recovering communities. Make certain you have discussed your collection efforts with on-site emergency managers or volunteer organizations before you attempt to collect goods.

**DRC’s Tasks During & After Disaster**

As a congregation, mobilizing to respond will happen primarily in three phases: **Rescue**, **Response,** and **Recovery.** The **Rescue** phase occurs immediately following the disaster once first responders have deemed it safe. The **Response** phase is where congregations respond to people’s critical needs and where most volunteering begins. The long-term **Recovery** phase is where most rebuilding begins, and survivors are served with the future in mind. The role of the DRC can differ in each phase.

**Rescue Phase** (Immediate)

As a *Willing & Able* congregation, you are an asset as a second responder during a disaster.

* Await contact from your coalition leader on any initial actions needed in the community.
* Buildings close to the disaster area can be used as temporary shelters. *Note: Your facility must be pre-approved by the Red Cross to receive the Red Cross sheltering resources.*
* Unaffected congregants may serve at shelters, feeding centers, and clean-up sites.
* Survey the staff and congregation members to determine those affected and assist their immediate needs. Caring for the most vulnerable will be a priority.
* Communicate with your congregation leaders about needs, resources, and service opportunities.

**Response Phase** (Short-Term)

Your Disaster Response Ministry Team will help your congregation respond to disaster by organizing the efforts of responders.

* Volunteers are needed to work at clean-up sites, feeding centers, shelters, etc. based on the need.
* Listeners are needed to attend to those affected. People need to tell their story repeatedly to help them through the trauma and grief.
* People can help survivors with applying for assistance. Publicize disaster assistance contact information.

**Recovery Phase** (Long-Term)

The long-term response to disaster focuses on the future. Homes are being built and repaired. Community committees for unmet needs are set up. Plans are made for clothing, furniture, and equipment, while relief activities continue. Depending on the scope and scale of the disaster, recovery usually takes three to five years, but it may be longer.

Rebuilding continues, but support diminishes as the event becomes old news. Congregations in the community continue to play an important role. Disaster groups, including your local disaster coalition, are critical in the rebuilding process.

* Talk with coalition participants and leaders to share needs and resources in the community and coordinate the response of participating congregations.
* Motivate trained volunteers to respond to the emotional, spiritual, and physical needs of disaster-affected neighbors.
* Share opportunities to serve, train, and prepare with volunteers.
* Encourage new and potential volunteers to receive training to serve.
* Help your members learn what to do. Be calm, heed warnings, follow instructions of public safety/emergency management leaders, be safe, and know how to help each other.

**Mobilization Scenarios**

1. **COVID-19 Congregational Leader Conference Calls**

At the beginning of COVID-19, congregations were forced to transition their worship service from in-person to online. Coalitions began holding regular conference calls as an open line of communication for DRCs and other congregational leadership to discuss technical solutions for helping them transition services and donations online. DRCs also shared available resources for families in need and volunteer opportunities to engage. DRCs were able to quickly pass this valuable information on to their congregations.

1. **Tropical Storm Imelda Sheltering**

Our community was hit with an unexpected tropical storm that quickly flooded the streets. The sheriff’s department had to step in and rescue families from the high water. Because the flooding happened so fast, there were no shelters set up. The sheriff’s department contacted the disaster response coalition for that community in search of a congregation to help shelter the families. The coalition leader reached out to the DRCs of their partner congregations, and within a few hours, one congregation opened its doors to meet the urgent need. Volunteers were also sent to assist with meals and fresh clothing for the families. Thanks to efficient coordination between the coalition, the DRCs, and their congregations, this solution was quickly implemented.

1. **Masks for All Project**

To reopen public spaces in our communities while limiting transmission of the COVID-19 virus, wearing face masks was strongly recommended, if not required. Government leaders asked Houston Responds to help provide personal use face masks to help ensure there are MASKS FOR ALL as we transition out of quarantine, especially for those in under-resourced areas. Our goal was for 1,000 congregations providing over 1,000,000 masks. When the call went out, congregations began participating by donating funds, donating supplies and materials, making masks, and serving as drop-off sites and distribution sites.

1. **Hurricanes Laura & Delta**

Hurricanes Laura & Delta hit Southwest Louisiana and devasted that community. Once we were notified of the needs and the ways we could serve them, congregations in the Greater Houston area began hosting supply drives and serving as donation drop-off sites. Congregations also volunteered to deliver donated supplies to the impacted areas.

**Disaster Communication**

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AlertMedia is a messaging communication tool we use to send disaster notification to disaster response coordinators and coalition partners. This system allows coalition leaders to send information about disasters/crisis for collaborating about the response. Messages are sent simultaneously by text, email, and voice call. We will host a separate informational session to get you set up and familiar with the AlertMedia system.



*Example of communication*

*sent using AlertMedia.*

**Coordinating Volunteers**

If your congregation is like most, you often face challenges in finding volunteers. You are not alone. Countless community organizations and ministries are also looking for volunteers, so you must be deliberate about recruiting. Finding people to serve is not always easy and can require a significant amount of work. Lack of an intentional recruitment strategy can become the barrier that prevents people from serving. As you begin your recruiting process, consider these things:

**Volunteers Are Your Greatest Recruiters**

One of the best places to start when it comes to finding new volunteers is within your existing disaster response ministry team. By encouraging your current team to recruit from their sphere of influence, you will add strong bonds to your team for each friend who joins.

**Be Specific in What You Need**

Some people in your congregation may not jump at the opportunity to become a volunteer during disaster. Still, the handy young adult may be more willing to help on a clean-up team, knowing it is a specific need. Sharing the exact roles you are looking for can attract passionate people who may have otherwise passed on the opportunity.

**Ask People Directly**

If you do not ask people directly, you will be understaffed. In our experience, the best volunteers have been those invited directly to join the team. Build relationships with people outside of your disaster ministry area and then ask them if they would be interested in serving.

**Announce It with a Simple Call to Action**

Announce that your disaster response ministry is looking for volunteers from the during a worship service. Share the "why" and give people a simple call to action, such as filling out a connection card, online form, texting a number, or signing up in the lobby. The simpler, the better.

**Make It Easy to Get Started**

No one likes jumping through hoops. If someone has to wait months for the next volunteer training meeting, they are likely to lose interest. Make the process easy, and they will be excited.

**Use Social Proof**

Communicating how current volunteers feel about serving families affected in disaster is a great way to humanize the need. By focusing on real people being helped by your congregation, people will have a better idea of what it means to serve in your disaster ministry.

**Set Volunteers Up for Success**

An untrained volunteer is not going to do you any good. They probably will not last very long. By taking the time to equip your volunteers, they'll be much more confident in their ability to do what you ask. Our local coalition will assist in training and resources to equip your volunteers.

**Share a Message on Serving**

Ask senior leadership about speaking on the topic of serving during a worship service to show people why they are called to serve and show areas of need in the community. Couple this with a simple call to action, and you will have new volunteers in no time.

**Publicly Recognize Volunteers**

Designating a particular time to recognize volunteers during a worship service will help your volunteers feel appreciated and give everyone a glimpse into who is serving. People who are not serving are more likely to get involved if they know someone else volunteering.

**Follow Up with Everyone Interested**

Have a plan to follow up with everyone who expresses interest in volunteering. Make it a habit of responding within 2-3 days with the next steps. Without a clear plan, people will fall through the cracks, or their interest will wane. Below is a guide on how to structure your volunteer ask:

1. **Project name:** Sorting Donations for Distribution Site
2. **Date and specific starting and ending time:** Saturday, October 1, from 9 am to 12 pm.
3. **Location:** In the Fellowship Hall. Provide an address if located off your campus.
4. **Description:** Volunteers needed to sort, categorize, label, and repack donations for the distribution site. Drivers are needed to drop boxes at St. Mary’s Church when completed.
5. **Share any conveniences being offered:** Childcare provided for volunteers if needed.
6. **How to sign up:** Sign up using the Volunteer Sign-Up sheet in the foyer after service. If you have any questions, call the office at 555.555.3232.

**Resolve Team Conflicts Quickly**

One of the quickest ways to discourage someone from serving is knowing that there is not a sense of camaraderie. Seek to resolve conflicts quickly among volunteers. This will not only keep your team healthy but will make recruiting easier. A poor team reputation will make recruiting much harder and will lead to high volunteer churn.

**Ask Your Current Volunteers How They Think You Can Recruit Better**

Chances are your current volunteers have picked up some ways that you can recruit better. Ask them why they started serving and see if they have any ideas for recruiting new volunteers. By doing this, you may even find someone who wants to help lead the recruiting charge.

**Create A Volunteer Page on Your Website**

Having a simple place for people to learn about volunteering and sign up is an easy way to find new volunteers. Create a page on your website that casts vision, shares volunteer testimonials, mentions current needs, and has a simple call to action with a form to get in touch.

**Send Out A Congregation-Wide Email**

Send an email through your mass communication system about volunteer needs. Keep it short and simple with a single call to action. By emailing everyone, you will have a better chance of finding people who are interested in serving.

**Post on Social Media and Encourage Volunteers to Share**

Post a regular social media update about current areas that need volunteers and encourage your current volunteers to share and comment. This is a great place to use a personal video from one of the senior leaders sharing the vision behind why you should serve. You will find new volunteers while also communicating that your congregation is a place to connect.

**Highlight Current Volunteer Stories Once Per Month**

Highlighting the story of one of your volunteers can encourage new volunteers to get involved. The story can be shared from the stage on Sunday, in a video, blog, or on social media.

**Record a Behind-the-Scenes Video**

Show people what it is like to serve in your community during disaster. You do not need a bunch of camera gear. You can find a volunteer with a knack for video production that would love to spearhead this project. Use the completed video during service, on your volunteering page, and on social media to recruit new volunteers.

These are not easy shortcuts to double the number of volunteers instantly. However, these strategies can help you double your volunteers in the long run. It will not be easy, and I will take time. So, start now. Take one step forward. This is your opportunity to expand your influence, impact, and ensure you will have volunteers when the next disaster strikes.

**Thank You for Being *Willing & Able* to Serve**

Thank you for your willingness to serve your congregation, coalition, and community by being a disaster response coordinator (DRC). An organized faith community response is critical. Working together, congregations and disaster organizations can ensure that affected persons are assisted and served with love and compassion. Together we can expedite a response to the next crisis in our community.

**Your Feedback is Needed**

We hope to continually improve the DRC training process to ensure it is clear, concise, and provides the most applicable information to help DRCs fulfill their roles. **Please help us by completing the training evaluation form.**