

CATHOLIC CHARITIES USA CONCEPT OF DISASTER OPERATIONS

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CATHOLIC CHARITIES CONCEPT OF DISASTER OPERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this Concept of Operations (CONOPS) document is to create a common understanding of how the membership of Catholic Charities agencies and Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) operate in disasters as a network. Common acceptance of this CONOPS document will facilitate better coordination between agencies and CCUSA before, during, and after disaster events.

Intended Users

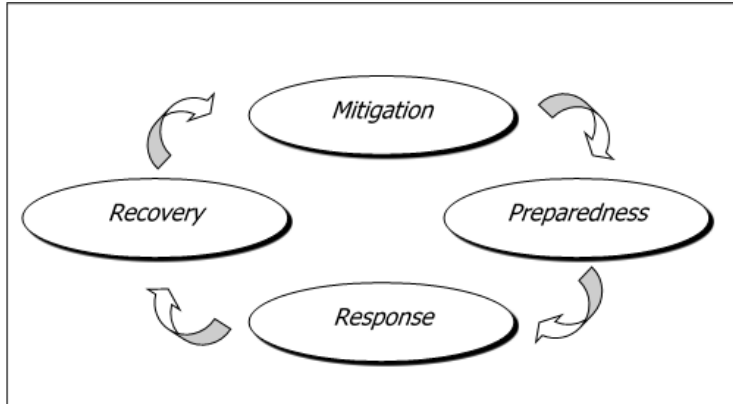
The CONOPS is intended for use by local Catholic Charities agencies, diocesan and parish leadership, and CCUSA. It is applicable in natural hazard events, including presidentially declared and non-presidentially declared disasters.

The Ministry of Catholic Charities in Disasters

Catholic Charities serves individuals, families, and communities impacted directly or indirectly by disaster events, who lack sufficient resources to recover. The ministry of Catholic Charities ultimately seeks to strengthen the resilience of individuals, families, and communities before, during, and after disaster events. In disaster response and recovery efforts, Catholic Charities provides direct assistance, to include: distribution of immediately needed goods and supplies, disaster case management services, home repair/rebuilding, and financial assistance among other programs and services that enable long-term disaster recovery. A Catholic Charities agency coordinates efforts with local, state and federal emergency management officials, as well as the civic and voluntary organizations supporting response and recovery efforts.

Catholic Charities in Four Phases of Disaster

While this Concept of Operations focuses on the Catholic Charities role in the Response and Recovery phases of disaster, the following section briefly defines and summarizes activities of all four phases to provide context and to emphasize the importance of actions performed before, during, and after the event.



Mitigation

Natural hazard mitigation actions can be taken pre-and post-disaster. They include actions to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. Through mitigation, disasters become opportunities to help communities and families build back stronger, and repetitive loss can be avoided. A Catholic Charities agency on its own and/or in collaboration with partners, can work with families and community leadership to make choices that achieve reduced risk from future hazard events. Examples of mitigation actions include: locating housing, business, and public infrastructure in safe areas (e.g. outside of flood zones), retrofitting assets that already exist in risk area (e.g. adding tornado safe rooms) and buying insurance.

Preparedness

Preparedness actions include actions taken to reduce the loss of life and injury during and following a disaster event. Pre-disaster planning includes assessing potential hazards and coordinating efforts to minimize the impact of hazard events. For example, preparedness in a coastal high flood risk area means knowing evacuation routes, having a three-day “go-kit” ready to go at a moment’s notice, and being ready for a safe return to a flood area (avoid flooded roads, don’t run generators in enclosed areas, wears proper safety gear when mucking out flooded home, etc.)

Another aspect of preparedness can be referred to as “readiness.” Readiness is an agency’s ability to withstand a disaster event and quickly mobilize and respond to identified human needs. Specific efforts are undertaken to minimize the impact of hazard events on agency facilities, assets (vehicles and supplies), staff, volunteers, diocese and parishes. *Continuity of Operations* (COOP) plans help the agency prepare for the continuation of the agency (as an operating business) in an effort to provide critical services after a disaster while protecting human and physical assets. An important aspect of readiness

for Catholic Charities agencies is to develop local community relationships with other organizations involved in disaster response and recovery during the preparedness phase. Additional practical suggestions for improving an agency's readiness to respond to disasters can be found in the CCUSA Capacity Framework.

Response

Response activities are those taken to save lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs after a disaster event has occurred. The response phase occurs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. During the response phase, business and other operations do not function normally. The response phase is when a Catholic Charities agency usually serves its vulnerable populations by providing direct assistance for short term needs. Some examples of response phase activities include opening of *Points of Distribution* (PODs) and distributing urgent commodities such as food and water, infant supplies, and clean up supplies. Many agencies also routinely conduct disaster casework and distribute gift cards to enable survivors to acquire exactly what they need to support their response needs.

Recovery

Recovery actions are those that assist households and communities affected by a disaster in reaching a "new normal" following the disaster event. In the recovery phase, a Catholic Charities agency usually provides long-term disaster case management services to help clients to define and achieve a new, post-disaster normal. This is accomplished by Catholic Charities in coordination with other government and non-governmental organizations providing local disaster assistance (interagency, financial assistance, volunteer labor, donated goods and supplies). Catholic Charities agencies often provide disaster case management services and participate in long term recovery groups in this phase as well.



ROLES OF CATHOLIC CHARITIES AGENCIES IN DISASTERS

Affected Catholic Charities Agencies

For the purposes of this CONOPS, “local” agency refers to a Catholic Charities agency within the geographic boundaries in which the disaster has occurred. Catholic Charities agencies provide help and create hope to more than 10 million people a year regardless of religious, social, or economic backgrounds. The foundation of all Catholic Charities disaster activities is our unwavering commitment to uphold human dignity and to serve anyone who is of need, particularly those who are poor and vulnerable. The local agency’s disaster response and recovery efforts do not replace services already available through the Red Cross, FEMA, county emergency management, or any other government or private organization. Rather, it works collaboratively with all responding agencies to avoid duplication of services and to ensure those most in need of assistance receive the services they require. Finally, CCUSA and the Catholic Charities network mobilize in support of, and at the request of, the local disaster-affected agency.

Catholic Charities USA Disaster Operations Services

CCUSA Disaster Operations staff are always available to support the local agency before, during, and after disasters. As appropriate to the needs of the local agency and the scope of the disaster, CCUSA may be contacted by agencies to request assistance or may proactively reach out to agencies to offer assistance in the following categories:

Technical Assistance

Local agencies may contact CCUSA to brief on disaster impacts to the community and the agency and review initial plans for response and recovery actions. As needed, CCUSA can provide guidance on how to develop a strategy for coping with the disaster and its impact given the local agency’s existing programs, disaster capacity, and other available resources.

Short Term Grants

CCUSA provides quick turn-around limited \$10,000.00 grants for assisting with the local Catholic Charities agency’s immediate disaster response and recovery needs. Agencies can apply for this grant immediately, but not to exceed 6 months from the time of the disaster event. One grant per diocese, per disaster event is permissible. Applications are available on the CCUSA member’s portal and can also be requested by emailing disasteroperations@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Long-Term Recovery Grants

In catastrophic, high-visibility disasters, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) may decide to hold a nationwide second collection for disaster relief efforts. When funds are made available, CCUSA manages and monitors the distribution of USCCB funds to affected local Catholic Charities agencies. CCUSA Disaster Operations staff will send out an “RFP Announcement” which includes qualifying parameters. Submitted applications are reviewed and processed through a grants committee that ensures the local agencies awarded funding have demonstrated capability to implement programming, monitor and evaluate activity, and properly manage grant dollars. RFP opportunities are dependent on the USCCB, and therefore, funds may not be available to CCUSA for up to a year after the disaster event.

Visibility Kits

Upon request, CCUSA can provide visibility materials for use by local agency field staff to identify them as part of the Catholic Charities disaster operation including hats, tee-shirts, armbands, car magnets and banners. These resources help disaster survivors identify Catholic Charities, and helps Catholic Charities staff gain access to disaster areas and affected disaster survivors.

Training

CCUSA training opportunities are available before, during, and after disaster events. These include: CCUSA just-in-time online training videos accessible through the Members Portal, one-on-one mentoring, peer mentoring, and webinar opportunities. CCUSA also offers in-depth disaster training opportunities through its Applied Institute for Disaster Excellence (AIDE). AIDE is held once a year at a select location. Information can be obtained using the following link: www.ccusaaide.org. All Catholic Charities members are strongly encouraged to take advantage of available trainings to strengthen their agency disaster capacity.

Peer Mentoring

Agencies across the country have gained expertise by working in their own disasters. CCUSA will match a disaster-affected agency with peers from experienced agencies based on disaster type, disaster experience, size of agency and capacity, agency positions. Experienced peers provide guidance and assistance to affected local agency leadership, with a focus on assisting with the development and implementation of a concise disaster recovery strategy.



Deployments

When the disaster-affected local agency identifies a staffing shortage and requests assistance, CCUSA will work to identify qualified staff to provide assistance in 2-week deployments. Funding of these deployments is shared by CCUSA, the “sending” agency, and the “receiving” agency.

Interagency Coordination

Disasters routinely impact across local counties, states, and diocesan boundaries. During any disaster, it is helpful to share information and coordinate response and recovery activities across affected local agencies. State officials may find it helpful to speak to a single Catholic Charities representative to be briefed on the full breadth of Catholic Charities relief activities in the State. Catholic Charities USA can help facilitate this important inter-agency coordination and ensure all local agencies have shared situational awareness regarding the relief activities, agency needs, and any potential gaps in services in a community.

National Partner Coordination

CCUSA has several established relationships with national partners they can help leverage in support of local agency disaster needs. These include FEMA, National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), State VOAD, Red Cross, St. Vincent De Paul Disaster Services Corporation and many more. Local agencies requiring in-kind donations and disaster services may contact CCUSA Disaster Operations staff to access national partner opportunities.

Catholic Charities Member Agencies

Unaffected Member agencies of Catholic Charities USA can also support the needs of a local agency affected by disaster and may contact that agency directly. However, affected local agencies can often be overwhelmed by offers of assistance and by client needs following a disaster and may be unable to respond. Member agencies seeking to help are strongly encouraged to contact CCUSA and together identify how they may best support the disaster operation, to include: prayers, donations, and potentially deployments of staff to the affected agency.

COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

Depending on the size of a disaster event, a wide range of government agencies and non-governmental organizations are engaged. Through coordination and collaboration with these partners, local Catholic Charities agencies can more effectively utilize limited resources in assisting disaster survivors and avoid duplication of benefits to those in need.

With Local Government

The local emergency management offices are critical stakeholders with which to integrate Catholic Charities disaster operations planning because they are the first to respond in a disaster. They have the latest information from federal, and other governmental authorities, and can serve as the link between the Catholic Charities agency and the state and federal government's resources. It is in the best interests of local agency leadership to know the players and become part of routine planning processes to ensure a true partnership. As disaster operational activities ramp up, local agencies may contact local emergency management to discuss and coordinate respective roles of the Catholic Charities agency and local government during response and recovery.

With State Government

The State emergency management office is responsible for protecting communities and citizens within the State. The State office carries out emergency management activities statewide, helps coordinate emergency management activities involving more than one community, and assists individual communities when they need help such as National Guard resources. Other State agencies that may serve as disaster recovery partners are those involved with housing, health, and social services. Local agency leadership that establishes relationships with these state agencies prior to disaster events have established contacts for addressing post-disaster needs. The State requests resources and programs from FEMA during and after a disaster. The State often relies on whole community partners, such as Catholic Charities, to deliver services to disaster survivors, from distributing emergency supplies to providing disaster case management services.

With Federal Government

When a disaster occurs and post disaster needs exceed the capacity of the State to respond, the Governor requests a federal declaration of an emergency or disaster. The President then grants or denies the request. Federal agencies become involved in local disaster recovery when the request for a



Declaration is granted (Also known as a Presidential Disaster Declaration or PDD). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) coordinates the response of all federal departments and agencies engaged in the response and recovery effort. FEMA exists to support the State's disaster response and recovery activities. In its support to the State, FEMA may connect other Federal agencies to assist with disaster efforts, including agencies such as: the Small Business Administration (SBA--disaster loans), Housing and Urban Development (HUD--housing needs), Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), Army Corps of Engineers (ACE--debris removal and more), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS--health needs), and many more.

Voluntary and other non-governmental agencies access federal information and resources through local government or the FEMA *Voluntary Agency Liaisons (VAL)* in declared disaster zones. FEMA VALs support the contributions of voluntary, faith-based, and community stakeholders active in disaster by building relationships – and coordinating efforts – with and across partner organizations and government agencies. VALs promote information-sharing and mutual understanding among partners, and provide guidance on integrating activities across various subject areas and the full disaster life-cycle, including their potential roles in long-term recovery.

With Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Voluntary Agencies

Communication networks between NGOs and voluntary agencies are critical during a disaster and are best developed prior to a disaster event. These networks are not the same in every community. In some communities, there may be a physical place where everyone agrees to meet at a specific time period after an event, a list of current names, address and phone numbers, or a website that can be activated on short notice. The important goal is to develop such mechanisms prior to an event.

With Catholic Charities USA

Coordinating with Catholic Charities USA is very important to help support a disaster operation. CCUSA can help an agency develop its response and recovery plan, coordinate with the Catholic Charities network as well as VOAD and FEMA Partners, and share human and material resources to help the relief effort as those resources are available.

OPERATIONAL TASKS

Post Disaster Assessment of Impacts

The size of the disaster and the number of persons affected will directly impact what a local agency needs to do and whom they need to work with. After any event, the local agency completes an assessment that includes but is not limited to:

- Disaster impact on the Catholic Charities agency staff and facility
- Disaster damage and other impacts
- Percent of diocese and state affected
- Disaster survivor needs
- Availability of resources to meet survivor needs (depends on type of disaster declaration)
- Locations, characteristics and resources of affected populations
- Potential partners

(Contact Catholic Charities USA for a copy of a *Post Disaster Impact Assessment Tool*)

Development of Disaster Operations Priorities and Strategy

Based on the outcome of the Post-Disaster Assessment, local Catholic Charities disaster operational activities can be developed and implemented. Priorities for disaster response and recovery and a strategy for meeting the priorities is based on the results of the assessment, support of the bishop, financial and staff resources, existing local emergency response and recovery planning, and coordination with partners. Contact with CCUSA Disaster Operations is always useful and in many cases, essential to developing this path forward.

Examples of disaster operations priorities include but are not limited to the following range of services which the Agency may wish to support with staff and/or financial resources, depending on agency capability and needs of disaster survivors:

- Clean-up/debris removal
- Distributing commodities and gift cards
- Disaster case management
- Sheltering
- Feeding
- Home repair/rebuilding, and
- Providing spiritual care

- Providing mental health services
- Home visits & delivery of care

Delivery of Services

Delivery of the services identified in the agency's post-disaster response strategy creates enhanced demand on the agency to perform certain functions. Disaster planning during the Preparedness phase can include tactics for transitioning agency operations to disaster footing so that disaster functions can be effectively accomplished. Functions that may be required after a disaster include:

Disaster Case Work Intake

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster event, Catholic Charities may receive an influx of requests for assistance from both current clients and other disaster survivors. Initially these circumstances may create an immediate increased need for both staff and volunteers to answer phones, return calls, and respond to in-person requests. In addition to finding and training personnel to assist, the situation calls for a disaster case management intake and tracking system that is ready to implement when needed. (See the CCUSA online training *Preparing for Disaster Case Management*) Later, in the recovery phase, a local agency may be the recipient of a disaster case management grant to assist disaster survivors with their long-term recovery.

Outreach and Information Dissemination

Reaching out for, and sharing information are critical to successful disaster response and recovery operations. Outreach to other VOADs, parishes and local government helps confirm the operational status of partners, immediate needs of survivors, services offered, resources needed, resources available to share (e.g. warehouse space, supplies, volunteers) to schedule joint activities such as distributions. Outreach to clients and the community is essential for discovering and confirming unmet survivor needs in specific locations and how best to meet them, as well as verifying that any planned services will be accessible for survivors.

Media Communications

Media relations and maintaining social media presence are particularly important during disaster operations to effectively deliver the services the local agency has identified in its post-disaster strategy. At a minimum the function involves a trained staff person to be in charge of media outreach and management, adjustment of the agency website to reflect disaster response efforts and ensuring that capability for online donation collection is operational.

Disaster Fundraising

The post-disaster assessment process and subsequent coordination with partners will help to quantify shortfalls between projected needs and existing resources. Local agency fundraising plans identify potential donors and community supporters that may be able to offer in-kind products and/or substantial donations/grants. Disasters add the dimension of urgency to both obtaining donations/grants and to expanding day to day accounting and funds management systems to handle potentially much larger donations and grants.

Volunteers Management

Volunteers are invaluable during disaster response and recovery; their services enable a local agency to meet the needs of disaster survivors who come to Catholic Charities for help. While the agency may already provide training and standards to enable volunteers to perform effectively and safely, a disaster adds the need for expediently creating disaster job descriptions for volunteers, recruiting and mobilizing, assigning to appropriate jobs, facilitating and distributing paperwork for background checks and liability forms, maintaining a volunteer database and tracking in-kind hours. Volunteer hours that are correctly documented can be credited as an in-kind match against federal grants that have a matching requirement.

Points of Distribution

Providing food to disaster survivors can be accomplished in various ways, and when existing food pantries and delivery ministries do not suffice, another option is to establish a Point of Distribution. PODs are set up in central locations where disaster survivors can obtain food and other life-sustaining supplies. PODs are usually established in collaboration with other non-governmental agencies that can contribute commodities, volunteers, equipment, and/or facilities. In addition to partnerships, successful POD operations require needs assessment, site selection, site management, safety and traffic control, commodities to distribute, staff and volunteers to sort and distribute goods, outreach to donors and to the public, and processes for tracking recipients, use of donated goods and volunteer hours. (See the CCUSA online training, *How to Set Up and Manage Points of Distribution*)

Donations Management and Warehousing/Logistics

These two functions are interrelated when a local agency intends to distribute food, water, hygiene kits, cleaning supplies, and/or baby products to disaster survivors. When goods are purchased with donated funds they are usually delivered packaged, sometimes in pallets that require a forklift to move. When

goods come from parish collections and other individual donations, the goods may be loose, and the donor organization may want the agency to pick them up. Both situations require transport capability and some kind of temporary warehousing facility. Once collected, loose goods require sorting and possibly repackaging, and pallets of goods may need to be dismantled for re-packaging followed by transportation to distribution sites. A system for tracking incoming donated goods, maintaining a reliable inventory, and tracking distribution is critical for effective delivery of services, and for accountability. (See the forms provided in CCUSA online training, *How to Set Up and Manage Points of Distribution*)

Tracking Services

As mentioned in several of the other function descriptions, accurate record keeping is an important part of effectively implementing the local agency's disaster operations priorities and strategy. Tracking the types of services and number of families served is an effective planning tool as well as a method of accounting for donated funds and goods and for tracking in-kind match. Accuracy requires that tracking begins as soon as services are initiated, which means the process, the forms, the staffing and any other elements need to be implemented as soon as disaster services are implemented.

Maintaining the Agency's Daily Non Disaster Operations While in Disaster Mode

Agency staff may be personally affected by the event and unable to get to work. The agency's disaster priorities may temporarily supersede day-to-day tasks. A Continuity of Operations Plan will assist agency leadership in seeking alternatives for this situation, such as local volunteers who may be trained to supplement staff, and by reaching out to CCUSA, whose disaster operations team is standing by to assist with deployment of disaster teams and, or other support.

For all functions, collaboration and coordination with partners for delivery of services is critical, as is the use of ministries of the diocese and parishes for disaster outreach to vulnerable or targeted population. Community Organizations Active in Disaster (**COADs**) and other previous relationships are now implemented to meet disaster needs.

Participation in Disaster Response and Recovery Structures

Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC)

Regardless of the existence of a presidential disaster declaration, MARCs can be established by the non-governmental organizations in local jurisdictions to market and provide services to disaster survivors. MARCs are developed to be a one-stop place for disaster survivors who may be limited in time or

transportation, or who are unsure of where to go first. In a MARC, Catholic Charities agencies can provide access to their services along with the services of other non-governmental organizations, and initiate the intake process.

Joint Field Office (JFO)

A federal-state facility called a JFO is established following a Presidential Disaster Declaration. The Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO), the Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator, the State Coordinating Officer, the Individual Assistance (IA) officer, the VAL, and the representative of FEMA's Faith-Based programs usually operate from the JFO. While Catholic Charities is not always represented in the JFO, these are senior officials with whom the Catholic Charities Executive Director establishes a relationship that may extend for a year or more depending on the severity of the disaster event, and help to facilitate the implementation of Catholic Charities priorities for the disaster.

Even with the establishment of the JFO, however, the Incident Command System (ICS) requires that disaster response is executed at the lowest jurisdictional level. The first response is always local, including the work of Catholic Charities agencies. Local organizations' requests for assistance must go to the State and may be forwarded to FEMA through an Action Request Form or an ARF. The ARF is the official document for requesting federal assistance. A state-authorized official must sign and date the ARF for the federal assistance to be processed. By signing the ARF, the state is officially requesting assistance and waiving liability stating that the support needed is beyond local or state resources or contracting capabilities. (Also by signing the ARF the state is committing to paying their cost share portion of the expense associated with bringing that resource into the impacted area.) The State is the requesting agency for a Disaster Case Management grant from FEMA.

Another important mechanism that is coordinated through the JFO while it is open is a "Routine Use Request." While FEMA typically cannot share the Personally Identifiable Information (PII) of disaster assistance applicants, local governments and NGOs providing disaster assistance may submit a Routine Use Request to avoid duplication of benefits. Once a certain number of requests have been made, FEMA will share information about unmet needs. This enables Catholic Charities to access FEMA application data to identify what households have requested federal assistance and the outcome of that request, as the agency seeks to identify who and where the greatest unmet disaster needs are in the recovery process.

Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs)

DRCs are state-federal temporary facilities that are established when a Presidential disaster declaration includes Individual Assistance. The purpose of DRCs is to provide access by disaster survivors to the wide array of services available from federal, state and local governments, and non-governmental disaster relief partners. The State identifies locations which are convenient for disaster survivors, including mobile centers and tents if necessary. Participation in DRCs provides an opportunity to inform survivors about Catholic Charities services and to initiate the intake process.

Long-Term Recovery Committees/Groups (LTRG/LTRC)

Any affected community may form a LTRC or LTRG to facilitate interagency sharing of validated unmet client needs and human and financial resources to meet those needs. Catholic Charities agencies routinely focus on helping the most vulnerable in their communities recover from the disaster event. This includes assistance directly to clients and managing volunteers that want to assist. Catholic Charities often provides the disaster case management for long-term needs and initiates advocacy to State, local, and FEMA regarding gaps in service, denial of assistance or hardships.

Post Disaster Reflection

Following a disaster response or recovery operation, local agencies conduct after-action reviews or “hot-washes” and invite CCUSA to participate. This practice helps all stakeholders assess what worked well, what can be improved, and how to be more ready to respond to the next disaster. Taking the time to deliberately process a disaster operation facilitates both continuous learning and improvement, and can be additionally helpful from a disaster mental health perspective as it provides a safe space to process the high-stress situation that a disaster operation represents.

DISASTER RECOVERY AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE FROM CHARITY TO JUSTICE

Catholic Charities disaster services are available to all individuals and families in need. These services are provided without discrimination or proselytizing and with respect for the privacy of all clients. This requires planning for maintaining the safety and privacy of undocumented disaster survivors. The overarching Catholic Charities focus on poverty reduction brings to life the fact that disasters disproportionately affect persons in poverty. Special consideration and prioritization are needed to address the unique circumstances of the poor and work to reduce systemic poverty. Disasters provide an opportunity for change and to rebuild stronger families and communities. The catalyst for this change may be in shifting local agency disaster operations from a focus of charity to one of social justice. This requires:

- Strategic outcomes such as building coalitions formed during the disaster recovery to also achieve long-term poverty reduction goals.
- Advocating for systems change in the community such as stronger building codes, expanding affordable housing stock, and entrepreneurial efforts such as training disaster survivors to rebuild their own communities.
- Engaging the individual, family and community in devising long-term solutions.
- Being familiar with and having the ability to access federal, state, and local resources made available only during times of a disaster. This may include but is not limited to disaster unemployment resources, FEA Temporary Housing assistance, Disaster SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Aid Program,) Legal Aid, Veterans services, HUD's Community Development Block Grant CDBG-DR supplemental funding for housing repair or replacement housing for vulnerable and low-income disaster survivors, and HHS Office of Community Services Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) for social services, health, and mental health counselling, case management

Visit <https://catholiccharitiesusa.org> or call 703-549-1390 for technical assistance, consulting, or to be connected to the Disaster Operations network.