

## Primary Operations

This section focuses on the top level organizational and operational aspects of the Miami Valley Long Term Recovery Operations Group (LTRG).

The LTRG came into existence in October 2019, approximately 4 months after the tornadoes struck the region. Key stakeholders, aided by FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons and Regional VOAD leads, worked to define the organizational structure, roles and responsibilities. The resulting structure and bylaws are detailed in the Governance section of these archives.

Information on overall best practice recommendations, lessons learned, key processes (including forms), presentational snapshots, and marketing and outreach are contained in this section.

### Best Practice Recommendations:

- 1) **Take steps to prepare your community before there is a disaster.** Ensure that your community's key leaders (both government and non-profit) have a basic understanding of how disaster recovery might work and what roles they may play in the event that there is an incident. Identify assets, like warehouses and organizations with the capacity to shepherd intake, case management, clean-up, and repair/rebuild. Know whom in your region is involved with state and national VOADs. Foster blue sky connections and collaboration between all these entities. This likely goes beyond well beyond what your region's emergency management has currently established.
- 2) **Stand up a campaign and sound repository for funds immediately.** You will need financial resources to aid your recovery efforts and directing them to a single source will allow you to streamline processes apply resources where they are most needed. We established the Greater Dayton Disaster Recovery Fund at The Dayton Foundation and directed philanthropic energy there rather than having it filter diffusely throughout the community. This allowed us the capacity to directly address recovery resource needs rather than to have to shop them through a traditional resource table scenario where an individual organization would have to assemble resources to meet each survivor's needs. In our case having these funds allowed us to effectively manage recovery in the midst of a pandemic by having the ability to deploy contractors when VOAD teams were restricted from traveling.
- 3) **Stand up a centralized intake and basic disaster case management quickly.** This is absolutely critical to ensuring the accessibility of assistance, the collection of standardized information for those seeking help, the ability to triage needs, and to ensure assessment of duplication of benefits and the equitable distribution of resources. Define and document eligibility criteria and service standards (including an appeals process). Be aware that traditional social services case managers will have to understand the nuance of identifying and focusing response to disaster caused challenges and that this can be somewhat challenging to those who typically have a more holistic, long term approach.
- 4) **Clearly define and continuously evaluate the spectrum of community recovery needs.** Our community fortunately had not dealt with a disaster of the tornadoes' scale before and had to process through what recovery would look like and who was responsible for various components of it. The understanding that FEMA would not provide sufficient resources for individuals' recovery in most instances, that government does not do individual recovery, and what VOADs are and how they help, took a while to evolve. Understanding the full spectrum of

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community recovery needs (individual, business, public infrastructure), the sequence of delivery for disaster assistance for individuals and households, and clearly defining the roles of various entities early will optimize your efforts.

- 5) **Collaborate closely with community recovery efforts and the leadership of the impacted jurisdictions.** The LTRG worked closely with the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (lead for community recovery work as our disaster impacted multiple jurisdictions and counties). Together we analyzed data, informed stakeholders, and pursued opportunities. Together we were able to present and address the full spectrum of recovery needs.
- 6) **Find the right leadership and leverage partners' native best-in-class capabilities to optimize recovery work.** We identified exceptional partners to assist us in recovery work and these organizations took on roles that aligned with their organizational missions and competencies. In our case:
  - Sinclair Community College loaned a senior executive with strong community connections and extensive project management expertise to lead the LTRG. Sinclair also provided technological support in terms of web hosting, forms development, media development, and physical meeting space.
  - United Way embraced the survivor intake role and leveraged their 211 Help Link operators to complete the LTRG designed electronic intake forms that were automatically forwarded to the Disaster Case Management supervisor.
  - St. Vincent de Paul Dayton leveraged their materials handling and warehousing expertise to support response and recovery needs.
  - Catholic Social Services stepped up to lead Disaster Case Management work.
  - The Dayton Foundation embraced the role of fiscal sponsor. Habitat for Humanity Greater Dayton served not only as a rebuild partner but also collaborated with the LTRG to pull down Federal Home Loan Bank Disaster Reconstruction Grants to address broader recovery needs.
  - Miami Valley Community Action Partnership collaborated to leverage weatherization programs to bring resources to the table for insulation, windows and HVAC systems on complex jobs.
  - When the opportunity for the Tornado Survivor Pathway to Homeownership Project emerged, County Corp the region's non-profit affordable housing organization, and the Homeownership Center of Greater Dayton, a non-profit focusing on educating and assisting first time home buyers, became exceptional partners.
- 7) **Leverage data both to inform your work and to update stakeholders on your progress and needs.** Early data was pulled from spreadsheets (file created from use of the case management intake form, FEMA ISSA, county damage assessments). As case management processes developed we leveraged American Red Cross' Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN) database. Our region had the good fortune to have exceptionally strong data analytics capabilities at the Regional Planning Commission. They were able to bring together the county damage assessment data, a subset of case management data (restricted to authorized users), pre- and post-disaster aerial imagery of the tornado impacted region, and to update that information monthly based on new data from the LTRG and the jurisdictions. This information was accessible through three different GIS tools (two public facing – Individual and Property Recovery Monitors - hosted on MVRPC's website and one, for case management, that was restricted to those in

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case management roles. Data will be extremely important to communicate need, secure resources, and to demonstrate progress.

- 8) **Leverage the expertise of your FEMA VALs and upon receipt of a Federal Disaster Declaration push your State leadership to pursue related declarations to ensure you have adequate resources** – FEMA VALs are experienced and can really bring great information and expertise to the team devising your response and recovery approach. Push your State contacts to pursue the spectrum of FEMA declarations that will support your recovery. While our Public Assistance and Individual Assistance declarations were early wins we had to advocate for and provide data to convince folks that we should pursue the Case Management declaration as well. While the Case Management declaration ultimately came through we did not have the resources until more than eight months after the disaster.
- 9) **Communicate a LOT to communities, leadership, partners and survivors.** Do extensive outreach to survivors. Leverage journalists and presentations to community groups.
  - Employ a multifaceted, multimedia approach during the recovery period and maximize media coverage for the kickoff or completion of new projects, incoming teams, and around disaster anniversaries. With reporter assistance we leveraged newspapers, radio, television and podcasts. We did door to door canvassing and dropped door hang tags offering assistance. We placed signs with information in the yards of the houses we were working on. We created business cards with information on where to get help that volunteer teams on repair/rebuild sites could hand to neighbors that stopped by active jobs. We did bill boards along major thoroughfares on routes to impacted areas. We established a website and social media presence to disseminate information. We followed organic, community-based disaster sites on social media and answered questions and shared information in those communities. We leveraged partners' communication channels to push out important messaging.
  - Be consistent - We developed a MV Strong logo and used it and consistent color schemes throughout our work to build name recognition to strengthen communication.
  - Present information routinely to existing stakeholder groups – local government and jurisdictional meetings. The more people are informed the more effective you'll be, the more support you'll have and the less misinformation will be circulated.
  - Routinely meet with your partners to share info, address any emerging needs or issues, and to ensure alignment of work. We used Zoom throughout most of our work due to the pandemic but it did offer some meeting efficiencies.
  - Share survivor stories (with survivor authorization of course) to foster and maintain community engagement and support for your work.
- 10) **Ensure that intake, case management, volunteer management, and construction processes are well constructed and strongly supported with appropriate tools, documented processes and standardized training.**
  - Consistency will be key to ensuring appropriate and equitable response to those seeking help.
  - Define and document processes, develop checklists and forms, employ appropriate tools (like CAN).
  - We debated on the choice of case management application early on but CAN was by far the best choice for our use, especially when the Federal Case Management Declaration

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resulted in FEMA contracting with American Red Cross to augment our case management team. Having everyone on one platform and having the extensive expertise of American Red Cross on the management of and reporting out of the platform was invaluable.

- Standardized training is critical for your team. We leveraged experts and their materials to train our team: Lutheran Social Services Disaster Service's national trainers for damage assessment; United Methodist Committee on Relief for disaster case management and volunteer management.

- 11) **Choose the right tools** – Others have done this below and their knowledge and work products can be incredibly useful. Some of our most valuable references and models came from the NVOAD Long Term Recovery Guide, FEMA Disaster Recovery Framework documents and form templates from United Methodist Committee on Relief and Lutheran Social Services Disaster Services. In terms of tools we valued the American Red Cross Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN) for our case management database, ARC GIS for data presentation and tools, and WUFOO for online forms to speed workflow.
- 12) **Be open to opportunities** – The influx of resources, enhanced communication and collaboration between partners and impacted communities post-disaster, and an increased awareness of the issues and challenges the communities faced pre-disaster may provide added opportunities to better your community. Because some underlying deferred maintenance had to be addressed in order to appropriately address tornado damage and we worked with partners to ensure that survivors were residing in homes that were safe, sanitary, secure and functional - many of our impacted areas are now in better shape than they were pre-disaster. Additionally, because our VOAD build teams wanted to do more for the community and in working with our community recovery folks we were able to secure 10% of incoming CBDG-DR funds we were able to launch an affordable housing project to build homes for qualified tornado survivors that were renting at the time of the tornadoes (Tornado Survivor Pathway to Homeownership Project). As of December 2021 we have sixteen Pathway homes in construction.

### Lessons Learned:

- 1) **Constructing a strong, thoughtful, collaborative executive committee is critical.** In our LTRG structure the executive committee functioned essentially as the board of directors for whom the executive director worked. The executive committee assisted in the fielding of policy and practice discussions and decisions, as well as the basis for the resource table decisions. Communication is key and throughout most of the recovery work the executive committee met weekly with the executive director and key subcommittee leads (construction, volunteer).
- 2) **Carefully consider the appropriateness, motivation and capacity of those you recruit or whom volunteer for leadership roles.** Some of the early leadership for various aspects of the LTRG were not good fits in terms of capacity or their ability to work within the collaborative environment. Initially appoint leadership roles on a temporary basis and adjust as necessary if conflicts arise.
- 3) **Carefully consider donations of material items.** We learned a lot about both unsolicited and solicited donations and donations management in this process.

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- Unsolicited individual donations – People want to help and giving material possessions makes sense to them (even when what they want to give is not appropriate). In the early disaster response phase you must have a place to direct these unsolicited donations in order to amass them where they will not impede response and recovery work. Having recovery partners like St. Vincent De Paul, Goodwill-Easter Seals and the Salvation Army can help you parse and use resources for community good when time permits.
  - Business and organizational material donations – We received some incredibly valuable donations (truckloads of roof shingles) and some that ended up costing us money to get rid of. Get specific details on the contents and condition of any offered shipment and only accept things you will be able to effectively use. Also strive to understand the packaging (Palletized goods? Weight of units? Any special handling requirements?) and shipping details to ensure you are equipped to handle receipt of donations. This guidance is recommended whether you are dealing with a local supplier or with a donations clearinghouse like Good360. As was recommended with individual donations, having a partner that traditionally handles donated goods can be really helpful. Habitat’s ReStore was able to find homes for select items that we received and were inappropriate for our use.
  - Leverage communication channels to redirect individual and organizational desire to help to either make financial contributions to your fund or to donate specific items that are needed.
- 4) **Capacity and competition of non-profits** – Disaster recovery roles were additional work on top of organization’s blue sky operations and may be challenged to sustain engagement. This is especially true when additional, unexpected events (like the need to process Federal ARPA COVID relief funds) are layered on. Keep tabs on the capacity, needs, priorities, and effectiveness of the non-profits involved in recovery efforts and make adjustments in workflow as necessary. If external resources are at play that potentially provide a revenue stream for non-profits (for us the Federal Home Loan Bank Disaster Reconstruction Program grants) you may see competitive behavior.
  - 5) **Beware of complicating factors that will impede your work** – Our recovery efforts were really challenging given the pandemic environment we operated in. VOAD teams were delayed or unable to assist, we encountered issues with both supply chain and contractor availability, and all operations were constructed to adhere to public health recommendations.
  - 6) **Secure early demonstration projects** – Jump in before you’re fully ready. Volunteer teams will arrive before you’re fully ready to roll out processes – have a few survivor homes, basic processes and seed funding ready to complete early demonstration processes to energize the larger scale work.
  - 7) **Secure access to legal counsel to advise the LTRG on specific issues and opportunities.** The Dayton Foundation’s legal counsel advised throughout to help us navigate survivor situations where land contracts, insurance or contractor issues were impeding our ability to provide assistance.

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### External references and resources:

- **NVOAD Long Term Recovery Guide** - [https://www.nvoad.org/all\\_resources/long-term-recovery-guide/](https://www.nvoad.org/all_resources/long-term-recovery-guide/)
- **FEMA National Disaster Recovery Framework** - <https://www.fema.gov/pdf/recoveryframework/ndrf.pdf>
- **UMCOR processes and form sets** - <https://umcmmission.org/response-page/#usdr>