

Start or Restart VOADs/COADs During the Preparedness Phase

by MICHAEL PRASAD
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Volunteer and community organizations active in disaster (VOADs/COADs) operate best by using their four C's: cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and communication. Emergency managers can build or strengthen this whole community capability in their own jurisdictions through public-private partnerships (PPPs), by performing the four E's – empower, endow, educate, and entrust.



The concept of government utilizing PPPs in support of events, incidents, emergencies, disasters, catastrophes, etc. is not new to emergency management. When planning the readiness actions needed across the entire disaster phase cycle (preparedness/protection/prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation), jurisdictions need to incorporate whole-community support of both their Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) as well as their Recovery Support Functions (RSFs), including their mission areas and core capabilities (<https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/mission-core-capabilities>). The U.S. federal government supports and encourages this through both the National Response Framework (<https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/frameworks/response>) and the National Disaster Recovery Framework (<https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/frameworks/recovery>). Governments at their own jurisdictional levels are ultimately responsible to their citizens for disaster response and recovery (as well as preparedness/protection/prevention and mitigation). As the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (<https://www.dhs.gov/archive/coronavirus/federal-response>) describes it, "The approach is locally executed, state managed, and federally supported." Some level of government entity is responsible for each of the ESFs and RSFs, even if it defaults to the local Office of Emergency Management (OEM):

- Sometimes those partnerships lead with a strong supporting (or even co-lead) private sector partner, such as for ESF#12 – Energy. ESF#12 is led at the federal level by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) but has strong private sector representation at the state and local levels. Neither the DOE or the local OEM repairs and restores power lines after a storm, the local utility company does.
- For other ESFs and RSFs, there are partnerships where the governmental lead entity has a significant role (leads the strategic, operational, and even tactical missions and resources, for example, across the entire disaster phase cycle). In those scenarios, the private sector partner (and/or nongovernmental organizations – or NGOs) is more of a force multiplier, subject matter expert, or both. For example, in ESF#6–Mass Care, the American Red Cross is the national subject matter expert on congregate care sheltering and also deploys its own resources nationally for sheltering. In fact, the Red Cross is the co-lead with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for mass care/sheltering at the federal level, and in many U.S. jurisdictions it is the co-lead for overall mass care as well. NGOs and private sector partners can also provide staffing and other logistic elements in many ESFs and RSFs, not just sheltering operations. The PPPs should be considered in scope beyond just a single ESF or RSF – and should encompass activities in the entire disaster phase cycle. The Red Cross also provides blood, community preparedness training and education, disaster health and mental health services, recovery casework, disaster damage assessment, feeding support, distribution of emergency supplies, community planning, and can even independently convene housing recovery groups supporting diverse communities. Many NGOs and private sector organizations can provide much more than just their flagship missions.

These partnerships can also bring in adjunct services that are not normally provided by government. Individual fundraising, collection, and distribution (i.e., support to specific families through donations from the public – especially for incidents where there is no, or insufficient, federal disaster assistance) are prime examples of services government does not normally perform. Many jurisdictions have these PPPs already in their emergency operations plans. The documented pre-planning is crucial – especially in support of cost-share benefits to the jurisdiction from volunteer efforts and donations – during presidential declarations (<https://www.fema.gov/pdf/government/grant/pa/policy.pdf>).



Using this whole-community approach, emergency management officials in Joplin, Missouri incorporated PPPs for support of the massive tornado that struck their community on 22 May 2011. What may happen after a significant disaster (especially those with high media coverage) is an outpouring of unsolicited financial, material, and human support. These aspects must be managed as well. Unsolicited (and many times untrained) human support of an incident can become a threat – and may even be connected to a possible attack on first responders or complex coordinated attack elsewhere. Material support (logistics supplies, equipment, etc.) also has challenges when unsolicited by incident command. Whether the items are being donated outright or just on loan, and what the liability issues are if the donated/borrowed items do not work properly (or if responders are not properly trained to use them) are just two issues associated with donated materials and equipment.

In the aftermath of the tornado, a very large number of volunteers spontaneously descended on Joplin to participate in response and, later, recovery operations. These volunteers were motivated, in part, by television broadcasts. Many of these lacked the training, supplies, and affiliations necessary for disaster response operations. AmeriCorps personnel from 6 different teams established and managed a Volunteer Reception Center on the [Missouri Southern State University] MSSU campus, which received 3,000 volunteer intake forms within its first 16 hours of operation. (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2011, p. 16 (<https://kyem.ky.gov/Who%20We%20Are/Documents/Joplin%20Tornado%20Response,%20Lessons%20Learned%20Report,%20FEMA,%20December%2020,%202011.pdf>))

The combination of properly matched and collaborative donations of every kind, was also successful in Joplin to assist that community through response into recovery. Those PPPs and ad-hoc connections for material donations and volunteer hours provided that community with the ability to cover their cost-share match (estimated at \$17 million) associated with federal disaster assistance (usually 25% of all project costs). In other words, for every dollar that the federal government (through FEMA, for example) sends to a local community, federal officials expect that local government to cover 25%. However, they will allow part, if not all, of that 25% to be covered by volunteer work and donations (in lieu of local spending on materials and paid staff). The 2011 tornado was the first substantial declared disaster where the cost-share match was fully covered, so that the municipality (and the state) had no bill to pay. (<https://kyem.ky.gov/Who%20We%20Are/Documents/Joplin%20Tornado%20Response,%20Lessons%20Learned%20Report,%20FEMA,%20December%2020,%202011.pdf>) for the federal public assistance provided.



Source: Greg Henshall, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Case Study: New Jersey's Back-to-Back Declared Disasters – Hurricane Irene in 2011 & Superstorm Sandy in 2012

In New Jersey between 2002 and 2011, the state level VOAD was a little more than a shell organization, kept active in name only by four lead partners: The American Red Cross, The Community Foodbank of New Jersey, NJ's 2-1-1 system, and The Salvation Army. Those four partners each had their own direct relationships with the New Jersey's Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM), which operates as a unit within the New Jersey State Police, as well as directly with most of the counties and municipalities within the state. The Red Cross and Salvation Army are also national partners with FEMA and members of the National VOAD (NVOAD). When Hurricane Irene struck the state in 2011, the 2012 summary report (<https://www.state.nj.us/njoem/media/pr081712.html>) from the NJOEM noted:

Seventeen New Jersey counties opened shelters to support the evacuees. The night prior to Hurricane Irene's predicted arrival (August 27/28) there were 16,191 registered evacuees supported in shelters across the State. County shelters supported 13,864 evacuees and the State-sponsored shelters supported 2,327 Evacuees.

VOAD and COAD groups (<https://www.state.nj.us/njoem/media/pr081712.html>), were the lead entities to help individuals and families with clean-ups; as only five counties (<https://www.fema.gov/pdf/news/pda/4021.pdf>) were part of the Federal Individual Assistance coverage, so not all families statewide with unmet disaster needs were assisted by government disaster programs. Five long-term recovery groups were stood up at the county level, coordinated through the NJVOAD at the state level.

When Superstorm Sandy hit the East Coast of the United States in 2012, the damage to New Jersey was roughly ten times as strong as Hurricane Irene the year before. Those same four NJVOAD lead member organizations knew that even with a full presidential declaration with individual assistance for all 21 counties (which was received), there would be large numbers of families who would not have enough resources to recover fully from this storm. Many communities (especially in those five Irene-struck counties) were still recovering from the 2011 storm when the 2012 storm struck. The NJVOAD members collaborated for missions along three distinct areas:

- To organize recovery coordination calls, communicating statewide needs and capabilities along four specific areas, for which PPPs could support: construction, volunteer and material donations management, fundraising, and case management. These four series of calls included state level OEM officials and other applicable ESF and RSF leads. The NJVOAD and its member organizations would cooperate with government on missions. Governmental groups cannot use federal disaster public assistance to help in individuals' homes (Cat A debris removal work, for example), but NGOs can.
- To build out capability for each of the counties to support both the immediate need for long-term recovery groups (representing each of the 21 impacted counties – some counties chose to work together in two or three county groupings, as their needs, as well as local resources were in many cases consolidated together with each other) and the structure to

revert back to COADs and VOADs at the county level after the recovery phase had ended for that jurisdiction. In performing this mission, the NJVOAD needed to be bolstered with more direct staffing and support. Those four member leaders were performing double or triple duty: covering their Sandy Response missions for their own organizations and in many cases the day-to-day operations that restarted after the initial response period ended. The NJVOAD was awarded a \$250,000 Sandy Recovery grant from the American Red Cross to fund full-time staff positions (the first time in recent history that any state level VOAD has had paid staff) to support these and other continuing missions of the state's Sandy recovery. The NJVOAD has been successful in continuing these paid staff positions beyond Sandy, even today nearly ten years later. They have also been successful in supporting and sustaining all of the COADs/VOADs at the county level to be more resilient for the next major disaster to strike the state.

- To support the FEMA voluntary agency liaison and the NJ State voluntary agency liaison (the emergency management lead from the NJ Department of Human Services, which is the lead for ESF#6) at the Joint Field Office, by interfacing with national (and international) NGOs who were flooding the state with human and material resources in support of recovery efforts (<https://www.fema.gov/blog/aftermath-sandy-volunteers-were-vital-resource>). Without a concentrated effort to manage both spontaneous volunteers and unsolicited material donations, there is a real probability of a "disaster within the disaster" (<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Archive/202852NCJRS.pdf>)."

Although this state and all subordinate jurisdictions ultimately had a zero-dollar cost-share portion for federal public assistance of this massive storm – due in large part to the congressional funding obtained through the Hurricane Sandy relief bill – the volunteer hours and donated materials were in the tens of millions of dollars in value to the state (the NJ Red Cross assistance alone was valued at \$22 million).



Source: Mike Moore, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The Four C's & Four E's

Emergency managers can capitalize on the VOAD movement's four C's – cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and communication (<https://slideplayer.com/slide/5307107/>) – for not only the relationships between VOAD/COAD groups, but also internally within governmental groups that support disaster response and recovery, and in-between the governmental and NGOs/private sector groups. The application of meta-leadership (<https://doi.org/10.1089/bsp.2006.4.128>) by emergency managers can help influence and direct the support provided through PPPs, especially since those groups are not under their day-to-day command and control. As with all partnerships, these must be established and cultivated throughout the disaster phase cycle, especially for preparedness/protection/prevention. The "Four E's" can make that happen:

- **Empower** – Emergency managers need to write VOADs/COADs into their emergency operations plans. Follow the standard planning, organization, equipping, training, and exercising for all hazards and all disaster phase cycles, with VOADs/COADs as equal partners to any other support partners (the jurisdiction may not allow them to be lead partners). Incorporate them with other ESF and RSF partners, both governmental and nongovernmental. Treat them and support them as any other professional partner. If the model is to share situational awareness and intelligence beyond law enforcement to all other command and general staff branches of the Incident Command System (as it should), do not exclude the VOADs/COADs simply because they are considered "outsiders" or "just volunteers." This also works both ways. With this PPP, the emergency management group will have a force multiplier of information and intelligence gathering capabilities.
- **Endow** – At the top level within the jurisdiction, VOADs/COADs need to be continually funded, especially at the state/territorial level. Unlike a long-term recovery group, which can be turned on after a presidential declaration event, COADs/VOADs need to be active throughout the disaster phase cycle. This takes funding. Include COADs/VOADs in mitigation project funding, preparedness grant requests, etc. Support them through policies, public information, and partnerships, and try not to compete for funding against them. The Red Cross has a preparedness program that installs free smoke alarms in homes across the country. They get donations of these alarms from national manufacturers. Therefore, a jurisdiction that solicits for alarms for their own fire department to distribute would be effectively circumventing the PPP and hindering that NGO's ability to fundraise and respond to other disasters.
- **Educate** – Part of the PPP should include cross-training and educational opportunities. The jurisdiction needs to train PPPs on their specific EOC protocols, for example, the same way they train any other partner. VOAD/COAD members should be able to take ICS courses and other NIMS positional training alongside governmental organization partners. In addition, the VOAD/COADs' own training should be made available to the governmental organization groups. These collaborations build networking as well. Again, as noted in "empower" above, exercise with the VOADs/COADs and cross-pollinate the observers and evaluators for the after-action reviews/improvement plans. Many of the VOADs/COADs have professionals on staff who have national-level experience in a wide variety of disaster scenarios. The jurisdiction will benefit from their outsider viewpoint much more substantially than from just hired consultants.
- **Entrust** – Although empowerment is the first step in formalizing the relationship and connecting the VOAD/COAD with the ICS (i.e., empower), the last and most critical step is to build mutual trust and belief that they and any other internal group (police, fire, emergency medical services, public works, etc.) can perform well. A fire department, for example, has rules, duties, missions, etc. that they will perform regardless of their paid/volunteer status. In other words, as an emergency manager, one already entrusts fire departments with completing these actions. There can certainly be a demand and requirement that the VOADs/COADs bring to the table the training and leadership experience needed for life

safety, incident stabilization, and property/asset protection. However, when they are part of the response and recovery missions, they should be treated the same as any other internal partner, or even members of that jurisdiction's own emergency management team. If this aspect is considered too much of a burden, or just considered as a whole community checkbox to be checked, this PPP will not succeed.

Observe how other emergency response groups in the jurisdiction must be nurtured and sustained – a VOAD/COAD is no different. They must stay active and engaged in all disaster cycle phases to be continuously available and resilient to serve in response and recovery.

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