

# State of Disaster Recovery: Expediting Assistance



**National  
Voluntary Organizations  
Active in Disaster**

COOPERATION | COMMUNICATION | COORDINATION | COLLABORATION



**UNITED  
WAY**

# Executive Summary

On February 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025, The National Convening on Disaster Recovery, co-hosted by National VOAD and United Way Worldwide, brought disaster leaders together to discuss the latest in Long Term Recovery. Sponsored by the UPS Foundation, the Convening focused on reducing the timeline for assistance.

Experts discussed lessons learned, case studies, and commitments to action, embarking on a new year of recovery and navigating how to best support communities and each other in this work.

Special thanks to the students from Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies for their contributions.



# What is the Assistance Continuum?

Disasters are federally funded, state managed and locally executed. But what does that mean? In a real sense, it means that local communities are in control of their own recovery; much like survivors must own theirs. External partners bring more than resources; they bring technical assistance, subject matter expertise, and surge capacity. They complement but should not complicate efforts already on the ground. External assistance should provide a scaffolding around the existing social service network while local assistance re-stabilizes, assessing the disaster caused needs, determines gaps, and begins recovery.

Local assistance is provided by community-based organizations, local government, houses of worship, social services, and other grassroots groups. Their role is to stabilize critical infrastructure and lifelines, manage immediate needs such as food, shelter, and transitional housing, coordinate volunteers and donations, and reconnect survivors with insurance, casework, and existing social service systems.

External assistance comes from state and federal agencies, businesses, corporations, national VOAD members, and philanthropic organizations. These partners bring surge capacity, technical expertise, and resources to complement local efforts while ensuring multi-agency coordination and broader system recovery.

Each level of assistance in the continuum is meant to benefit the communities affected by disaster, while coordinating and cooperating between each other.

# Where are the Gaps Within Assistance?

There are gaps in assistance continuity when survivors of disasters migrate into different phases. For example, when survivors move from a disaster shelter to transitional housing, they may lose access to resources that were provided at the shelter, and those providing assistance may lose access to them. Case work, referral systems, and federal applicant services need to connect resources to case management at the local level. During a response and initial recovery, local level social services case management activities must be supported by surge capacity and technical assistance instead of survivors going through local, state, and federal systems that duplicate their navigation of needs.

After each catastrophic event of the last thirty years, the emergency management community has established new federal programs to support survivors. What are the unintended consequences of implementing huge federal programs when a more local approach could keep survivors in their communities and expedite economic recovery? Needs assessments are critical, but speed is of the essence. What can local communities do prior to a disaster to better ready themselves?

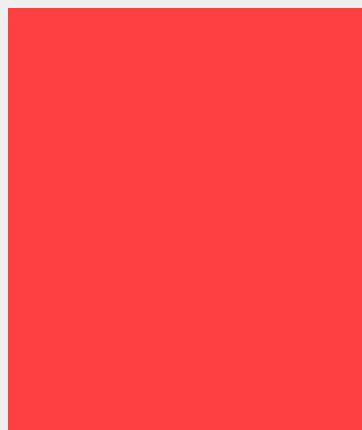


# How Do We Increase Assistance to Survivors?

**Don't Wait for External Support:** There are some disasters in some areas that do not receive external resources or media attention even though they devastate local communities. Survivors still need assistance even if the government is not there. Local networks need to be readied to absorb increased needs as well as increased external surge capacity, if and when it arrives.

**Capacity Building for Local Social Service Programs:** Disaster recovery begins and ends with the local community. Providing surge capacity and technical assistance while integrating into existing social service networks allows for external partners to better support communities. This ensures affected communities 1) own their own recovery 2) manage the influx of need with available resources and 3) integrate disaster caused need into existing resources.

**Mitigate Recovery for Repetitive Loss:** Recovery efforts need to be used in an efficient way to provide safety and mitigate future loss. We need to balance resiliency efforts while keeping communities intact. We can aim to use the data science to help mitigate communities' choices through building up foundations and utilize up to date codes for building in place.





# How Do We Increase Assistance to Survivors?

**Create a System of Systems:** Pool the resources and capabilities to create a new more complex system that offers more functionality than simply the sum of the parts. These collaborations should not be limited to those organizations that include disaster in their mission. After a disaster, the needs of the entire community will increase with all aspects of pre-existing social services being called upon. It cannot just be about the organizations that parachute in. If there isn't a network to connect into, those resources cannot be used effectively. Plus, those organizations eventually parachute out, leaving the community to finish the work.

**Assess Health of Long-Term Recovery Groups:** Long term recovery groups need to have local support, volunteers, funding, and a mission. Without these needs, long term recovery groups falter.

**Resources:** Funds or resources in the form of grants that extend beyond the first weeks can be important to sustain efforts and serve as an access to influence. This would include leadership buy-in and long-term support: Funding, influence, participation, and use of political capital by the politicians and senior leaders within a community make a positive impact on additional participants and sustainability. Emphasis needs to stay on the duration of recovery.





# Thank You

We appreciate everyone that was able to attend the National Convening on Disaster Recovery and share their tremendous insight and experience. If you have any questions about this report, or about National VOAD, please contact [info@nvoad.org](mailto:info@nvoad.org).



703-778-5088



950 N Washington Ave, Alexandria, VA 22314



[www.nvoad.org](http://www.nvoad.org)