

NATURAL DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Waiting for the inevitable is not a plan when it comes to natural disasters. The right time for state and local governments to lay the groundwork and craft a sustainable response and recovery strategy is before the hurricane, heatwave, blizzard, flood or tornado strikes.

Specific recovery actions for a community will vary based on the precise nature of the event, the damage it inflicts, and what the community was like before the disaster; however, taking the time to develop a preparedness plan can assist in quickly getting the community on the track to recovery following a disaster. For people within communities impacted by the disaster—struggling to rebuild their lives, homes and businesses while trying to make ends meet—a preparedness plan can make all the difference. Starting this plan before the disaster strikes allows stakeholders to ask critical questions and seek responsible answers.

Key Components of a Disaster Recovery Action Plan – Questions to Ask

To be eligible for Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a community must evaluate the **key components of a disaster recovery Action Plan: housing, public infrastructure, economic development, and planning and administration**. Below, we define the activities within each of these components and provide questions to guide thoughtful development of programs that adhere to CDBG-DR program objectives and requirements—in advance of disaster.

Housing

After a disaster, it is essential to engage in activities that restore and improve the housing stock, which includes new construction, rehabilitation or reconstruction for rental; owner-occupied single-family; or multifamily dwellings.

Questions to ask:

- What are our high-risk housing areas?
- Are they single-family homes or rental communities?
- Is the area primarily low income?
- Do we have up-to-date census information that will identify the immediate and long-term needs of this community that are likely to follow a disaster?
- Does our Consolidated Plan address any issues likely to arise in the wake of a disaster in these high-risk areas?

Public Infrastructure

The components of our public infrastructure—including schools, health care facilities, and water and wastewater facilities—may require rebuilding or replacement following a natural disaster.

Questions to ask:

- Do we, as a community, have adequate funding to pay for disaster clearance and debris removal from public buildings that are damaged as a result of a disaster?
- How vulnerable are our public services to different natural disasters?

Economic Development

Local economies can be hit just as hard by a disaster as tangible infrastructure. Activities that revitalize economic activity or promote economic growth include job training and workforce development loans, grants to businesses, economic base revitalization, and improvements to commercial and retail districts.

Questions to ask:

- Do we have areas that need additional workforce?
- Do we have a segment of the workforce trained and credentialed in disaster recovery-related areas such as lead abatement, green building, construction, mitigation and code enforcement?

Planning and Administration

Activities related to the planning and execution of community development activities assisted by CDBG-DR funding include hiring of staff and related costs required for overall management, planning, coordination, monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

Questions to ask:

- Given that the funding available for these activities would be limited to 20 percent of the grant amount, do we have an adequate process in place to document the salaries of staff members that would be allocated to disaster recovery efforts?
- What tasks will be required of existing staff to handle in the disaster recovery effort?
- Is it more cost effective to hire a consulting firm?

Utilizing a consulting firm experienced in the disaster recovery process can be helpful to kick-start the funding process. In many cases, they can step in and facilitate the change more quickly than grantees can mobilize and change staffing responsibilities to accommodate changing administrative needs. Disaster recovery consultants can draw on their expertise to assist in navigating the components of an Action Plan and provide feedback and direction regarding program creation.

Every community is different, as will be the disaster that could strike it. Gathering information and asking critical questions now can help avoid pitfalls, delay and waste, forming the basis for a “smart” Action Plan that leads to a more efficient, timely and responsive funding process. It can assist grantees in balancing the overall recovery strategies with individual recovery programs.

Online:

<http://portal.hud.gov/>

This post is Part Four of a six-part part series by ProSource Technologies to assist state and local governments with disaster recovery planning. Please e-mail disasterseries@prosourcetech.com to receive electronic notifications of each article as they are released.

ProSource is a professional consulting firm specializing in right of way/site acquisition, relocation, environmental, and disaster and emergency management services for public and private clients. Experience with large-scale recovery efforts around the country has given ProSource the knowledge and capability to help other communities with disaster preparedness planning, as well as manage their critical, finite resources when disaster strikes.