

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.

The Road to Resilience

Resilience is a key component of disaster recovery—it reflects the dynamic process a community undergoes in order to become strong, healthy and successful again after an adverse event. **A community that does not plan for disaster in advance diminishes its chance to be as resilient as possible and may lose opportunities for timely recovery funding.** Communities need to develop the key elements of resiliency, which are stamina, flexibility and adaptability.

All three come into play in the wake of a disaster. Needs can arise that require unprecedented solutions and collaborations between unfamiliar partners. Existing administrators may become overwhelmed while managing recovery funding from multiple sources under unfamiliar regulations that affect new programs. In spite of the challenges, **a community can emerge a more resilient place** if those in charge of the recovery mission understand how to apply available funds to meet urgent needs early on and to invest in projects that provide the most long-term benefits.

Key to becoming more resilient is creating a preparedness plan, which entails understanding the elements and requirements that need to be met—particularly in regard to funding sources—in advance of a disaster.

For instance, disaster relief funds authorized through the Stafford Act will not be sufficient for long-term recovery. **The greatest source of relief and recovery funding will be the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR).** CDBG-DR funds are disaster-specific congressional appropriations with complicated rules and regulations that vary based on the region and the disaster.

HUD offers disaster planning and recovery guidance to help communities prepare and become resilient. The [HUDexchange.info](https://www.hudexchange.info) website includes a variety of information on CDBG-DR programs to help communities with their recovery efforts.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) also offers a number of resources to help with disaster recovery planning, including the National Disaster Recovery Framework and the Comprehensive Preparedness Guide. For information on these and other disaster planning tools, communities can consult the [FEMA](https://www.fema.gov) website.

A resilient community:

- Prepares so it can address change in the wake of disaster
- Engages its stakeholders individually and collectively
- Identifies physical and economic vulnerabilities and strategies for mitigation
- Identifies resources for acute emergency relief and long-term solutions
- Develops an Action Plan for disaster recovery
- Adapts to evolving circumstances, whether it is volatile weather, health and sanitary issues, emergency regulatory changes, or emerging stakeholder concerns
- Commits to the process of recovery

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:

<https://www.hudexchange.info/>

<http://www.fema.gov/>

This post is Part Six of a six-part series by ProSource Technologies to assist state and local governments with disaster recovery planning. Please e-mail disasterseries@prosourcetech.com to receive notifications of future related articles 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.