

## **PART VII - OTHER RECOVERY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

Community relations staff are among the most visible federal and state disaster recovery staff to local officials and community leaders during disaster recovery. “Community relations is an information collection, dissemination, and public relations activity used to determine whether disaster-affected communities and individuals are receiving the assistance to which they are entitled.”<sup>1</sup>

Among the roles of community relations staff are the following:

- < Provide information on types of assistance that are available and how to obtain the assistance;
- < Provide this information at a level of detail appropriate to the situation and the customer;
- < Work with those who deliver disaster recovery programs; and
- < Search for and act on opportunities to inform and assist disaster recovery customers.

FEMA-state community relations staff may include a community relations officer, field operations coordinator, community liaisons, outreach specialists, hotline coordinator, and hotline operators.

### **MANAGING VISITS BY OFFICIALS FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS<sup>2</sup>**

Following many emergencies and major disasters, “official” visitors from outside the area will quickly converge upon the disaster area. The larger the disaster, the bigger the multitude who will come to look and learn. In the midst of response and initial recovery activities, you can expect to host high-level state and federal government officials, foreign delegations, national and international scientists, academic researchers, and colleagues from other jurisdictions who hope to learn lessons firsthand. Official visitors cause problems and create opportunities simultaneously: they are admittedly one more thing to deal with at a busy, chaotic time, but they can communicate to important others the need for additional funds or resources, and ultimately, their sharing of information with interested national and international communities enhances preparedness, response, and recovery knowledge and competence.

Possible things for local officials to consider include:

- < Endeavor to handle official visitors in a consistent manner.
- < Consider designating a single person as a point-of-contact for the visitors, and one or more other people to arrange the details of their visits.
- < A small team, coordinating with your public information function, may be able to effectively handle the logistics of official visits.
- < Have briefing information available, including maps, as handouts for visitors. Brief each on the situation, policy, and procedures prior to visiting disaster sites. Coordinate with on-site personnel as necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> FEMA *Community Relations Sample Plan*

<sup>2</sup> This is adapted from *Earthquake Recovery, a Survival Manual for Local Government*, California OES, September 1993, pp 81 and 82.

- < Be as consistent as possible with policies regulating access to restricted areas. You can avoid problems with residents and business owners if official visitors are not given special treatment that local citizens are denied.
- < Be prepared to assist some individuals or groups (usually researchers) for an extended period of time. It's useful to have a single contact person to facilitate requests for information, arrange meetings, and review draft reports. This can be very time-consuming.
- < Request that you receive a copy of any reports or research resulting from the visits. Consider requesting copies of slides or photographs as a *quid pro quo* for your assistance.
- < Coordinating with OEM and FEMA may ease the burden that falls directly on you since some visitors will want to visit more than one local jurisdiction.

If you are shorthanded, request assistance from nonprofit organizations that are knowledgeable about the local community (e.g., chambers of commerce, visitors associations, etc.). Give all volunteers a thorough orientation, current information, and clear instruction on policies and procedures in effect. Be sure your legal counsel implements any necessary liability-related releases.

### **RECOVERY AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A MORE DISASTER RESISTANT COMMUNITY**

Disasters are often tragic events, damaging property, causing injuries and sometimes loss-of-life, and with long-term economic costs to the public and private sector. Recovery from these events can, however, create an opportunity to rebuild the community in a more disaster resistant way. There is a short period of time during which both public support and political will exist to allow tough decisions to be made to the long-term benefit of communities.

These decisions, sometimes implementing actions already proposed in a community's hazard mitigation plan, may be accomplished through changes in land use, building codes and other standards, and in other ways. For example, some land uses may simply be inappropriate for high risk areas. Stricter standards may be applied to new construction and substantial repairs or improvements, than those applied to existing pre-disaster structures.

Cost-effective hazard mitigation may be accomplished when repairing damaged public facilities through the FEMA-OEM Public Assistance Program (see Part IV, Section A, 5.h.v.).

In addition, through Section 404 of the Stafford Act, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, FEMA may contribute up to 75% of the cost of hazard mitigation measures which are cost-effective and which substantially reduce the risk of future damage, hardship, loss, or suffering in any area affected by a major disaster.<sup>3</sup> Hazard mitigation implemented through Section 404 is much broader in scope than hazard mitigation proposals made through Public Assistance, which must apply to a particular damaged facility. Additional information on grant funds which may be made available through Section 404 can be found in the state's *Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Administrative Plan*.

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<sup>3</sup> A similar mitigation program has been made available by FEMA to implement hazard mitigation measures in a pre-disaster environment. The Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Program emphasizes reducing losses to repetitive loss properties as a top priority, i.e., those properties that have experienced past, multiple disaster losses.