

# OREGON NONPROFIT DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

NOVEMBER 2018

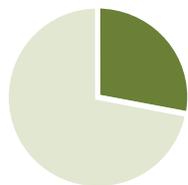
Benjamin Kerensa, Vestal Elementary School

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

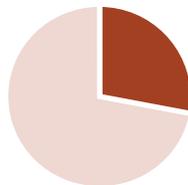
The nonprofit sector plays a critical role in society. Nonprofits are essential to the well-being and vibrancy of our communities. They are also regarded as a “critical civic infrastructure” that is essential for the delivery of a range of social services that are key to the livelihoods of the young and elderly, the disabled, those suffering from debilitating illnesses, and those living in poverty within our communities. Not only do nonprofits complement government in the provision of social services, they often are contracted by government agencies to provide many critical public social services. So what happens when these organizations are thrust into a disrupted environment with greatly expanded roles during and after a disaster? How prepared are they to recover and respond in these roles and what level of assurance can we give to their response?

The Portland State University, in collaboration with the Nonprofit Association of Oregon (NAO), released the Oregon Nonprofit Disaster Preparedness Report ([www.tinyurl.com/ORNP-Disaster-Report-18](http://www.tinyurl.com/ORNP-Disaster-Report-18)). Developed through a participant survey conducted in collaboration with the City Club of Portland’s Earthquake Report Advocacy Committee (CCERAC) and the NAO, the 2018 survey was designed to assess Oregon nonprofits’ disaster preparedness activities across various dimensions. Based on responses from 189 nonprofits, the report results are quite revealing regarding how concerned and informed nonprofit respondents are about potential hazards, what actions they have taken to prepare for disasters, as well as their perceived roles should a major disaster like the Cascadia Subduction Zone (CSZ) event occur.

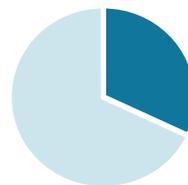
**Hazard Knowledge and Concern:** Although Oregon is prone to nearly all types of natural disasters, earthquakes, wildfires, and severe winter storms were of most concern and believed to be most likely by the nonprofits in our survey. Nearly a quarter to a third of the nonprofits self-assessed as (very informed on severe windstorms, earthquakes, and volcanoes). Organizations reported being least informed about severe winter storms, with only 3.4% (of 117 nonprofits) reporting being “very informed.”



28%  
Very informed on  
severe windstorms



27.9%  
Very informed on  
earthquakes



32%  
Very informed on  
volcanoes



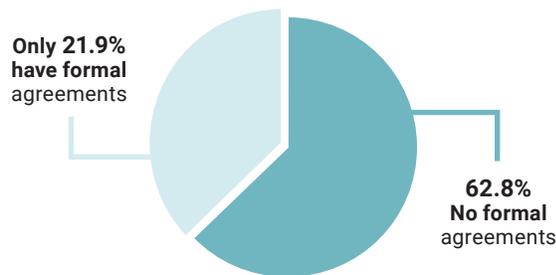
3.4%  
Very informed on  
severe winter storms

### Disaster Planning and Preparedness with Respect to Hazard Knowledge:

Most organizations report taking efforts, within the last two years and more, to learn about Cascadia Subduction Zone (CSZ) earthquake and how a major earthquake or another major disaster could impact their region.



**Disaster Planning and Preparedness with Respect to Management and Coordination:** Most nonprofits (76.4%) in this study also indicated discussing a potential disaster in an organizational meeting, with 72.7% (of 139 nonprofits) developing evacuation plans for their organization, but only 57.6% providing training and educational materials to their staff concerning their roles during a major disaster, within the last two or more years.

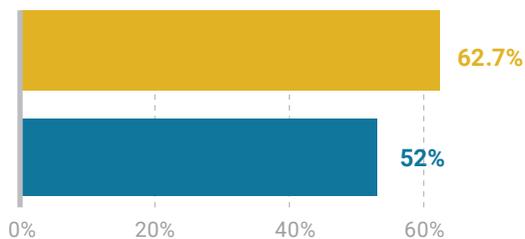
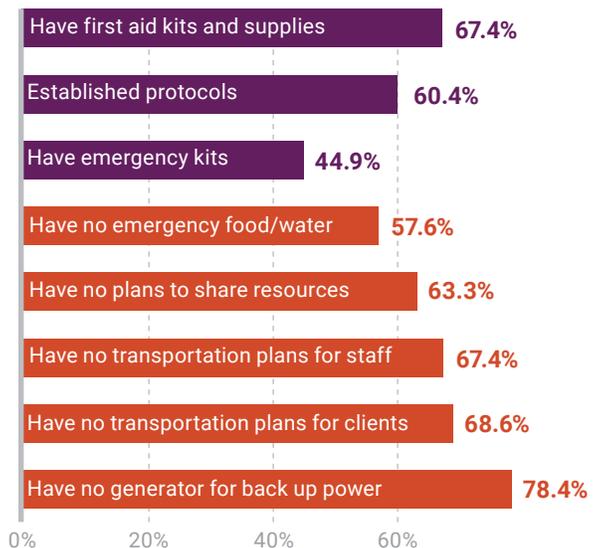


### Formal or Informal Preparedness or Response Agreements:

Nonprofits scored the lowest in this area. Most nonprofits have *never* entered into any formal or informal agreement with any City, County, State, or Federal Government entities, let alone, other nonprofits within the region they serve.

**Supportive Resources:** The resources nonprofits have set aside for disaster response and recovery, including resource management for storage and the planned dissemination of those resources in the event of a disaster was an area where nonprofits had mixed preparedness. On the low-cost end, more than 2/3 of 138 nonprofits *obtained first aid supplies for use by the organization in a disaster*. 60.4% *established communication protocols with staff/volunteers in the event of a disaster*, and 44.9% *obtained an emergency kit for use by the organization in a disaster*. A concerning number of nonprofits have *never* obtained emergency food and water, made plans to share resources with other organizations, nor made transportation plans to and from services for either staff or clients. Additionally, 78.4% **do not** have a generator to provide emergency power in the event an earthquake or other disaster.

### In the event of a natural disaster, nonprofits...



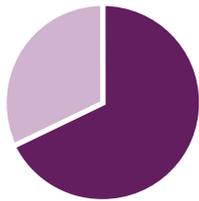
First aid training was more common than encouraging staff and volunteers to prepare a disaster plan.

**Life Safety Protection:** We asked organizations about the life safety and property protection strategies they have undertaken over the past two or more years. We find that training and planning tools have been provided to staff and volunteers but not for clients. 70% of 137 nonprofits reported *never* providing training for clients on how to avoid death/injury should a major disaster strike.



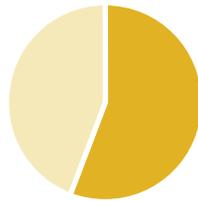
Tech. Sgt. Nick Choy, U.S. Air Force, Vernonia Flood 2007

**Property Protection:** Our survey results show that the main type of property most nonprofits protect are data and records. A confirmed 15 buildings (out of 136 responses) were retrofitted for earthquakes in the last two or more years. Out of the 50 nonprofits that reported owning a building, only 8 have been retrofitted for earthquakes.



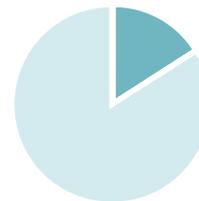
**67.9%**

Nonprofits secured data and critical records within the last two years



**55.8%**

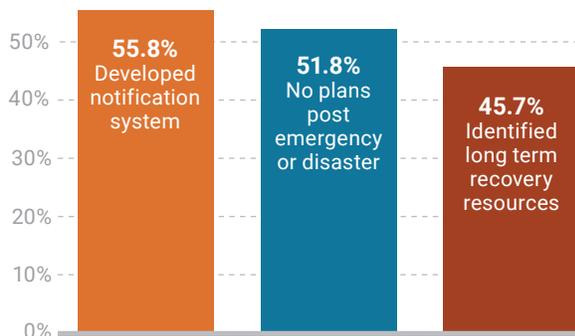
Never provide training for emergency fire and shutting off gas lines



**Only 16%**

Confirmed retrofitting their own buildings for earthquakes

**Early Recovery:** 55.8% of nonprofits reported *developing a notification system for staff/volunteers to be activated in case of an emergency.* Additionally, just a little over half of nonprofits reported they have **never** developed a plan for how their organization would continue operations after an emergency/disaster, what is commonly referred to as a *contingency plan or business continuity plan.* Even fewer nonprofits reported *identifying long-term recovery resources* such as, insurance, physical resources, and financial resources, compared to 42% of 138 that have **never** done so.



**Challenges & Barriers to Disaster Preparedness:**

Nonprofits report facing incredible challenges and barriers to their organizational disaster preparedness efforts.

The most frequently cited challenges were:

- Limited staff/volunteer time to dedicate to disaster planning and preparedness (108 nonprofits)
- Lack of financial resources for undertaking disaster preparedness (92 nonprofits)

Other barriers included:

- Competing urgent demands associated with serving clients (69 nonprofits)
- Non-immediacy of disasters (62 nonprofits), and
- Lack of guidance and/or structured (59 nonprofits) information specific to your organizational context

**Supporting Nonprofit Organizational Resilience:** The most cited needs nonprofits identified to help improve their organizational resilience include the following: templates for disaster preparedness plans; resources, particularly, funding, time, staff; training and workshops around disaster planning; expert opinion or some consultation on disaster planning.

Overall, nonprofits do see a role in disaster response, through providing shelter, assisting with post-disaster recovery and coping as well as, serving and protecting their clients and staff. Based on these findings and nonprofits' desire to be involved, we strongly urge the state of Oregon, the public agencies that contract with nonprofits, and the Oregon philanthropic community to take committed measures to assist nonprofits to bolster their disaster preparedness and resilience.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the strong concerns about hazards impact and efforts to build organizational hazard awareness, the nonprofit organizations in this sample exhibited low levels of disaster preparedness across multiple dimensions, which correlates to a lack of resiliency. Based on responses throughout the report, a significant number of nonprofit organizations in this study have “never engaged in” 20 of 36 activities associated with disaster resilience practices.

A main reason for low preparedness is limited resources in terms of staff/volunteer time, followed by a lack of financial resources for disaster preparedness. This finding is also confirmed by the fact that larger budget organizations completed more preparedness tasks compared to smaller organizations. This suggests that nonprofit organizations could benefit from additional human resources, be it through funding of temporary positions or state-provided assistance teams. Collaborative philanthropic, state, and local partnerships can be springs of the critical resources nonprofits need to bolster and their disaster resilience to mitigate overall hazards impact, as well as help them maintain their operations in the event of an emergency. We envision such collaborative partners being sources of funding, expertise, and technical assistance. Capacity building efforts should center on education and training, providing readily available templates and examples of preparedness plans, expanding partnerships, and committing resources – particularly funding, expertise, technical assistance, and time so our nonprofits may bolster their disaster resiliency.

While the results in this study are quite telling in terms of organizational preparedness levels, the challenges nonprofits currently face in their efforts to build up their disaster resilience, and the kinds of assistance they need to do so, we are limited in our ability to generalize about the disaster resilience of Oregon's nonprofit sector as a whole. Nonetheless, the issues presented in this report highlight a critical need for investing in nonprofit disaster resilience, and this will serve to significantly increase their ability to provide assistance and services in the event of a disaster.

Nonprofits understand their importance in a disaster and do see a role in disaster response to protect both their clients and staff. We strongly urge the state of Oregon, the public agencies that contract with nonprofits, and the Oregon philanthropic community to take committed measures to assist nonprofits to bolster their disaster preparedness, response and resilience.

*Grace L. Chikoto-Schultz, Andrew Russo, & Paul Manson (Portland State University)  
with Jim White (Nonprofit Association of Oregon)*

