

PLANNING FOR DISASTER

Guidance on Disaster Preparedness and
Response for Leaders of Domestic Violence
and Sexual Assault Organizations



This toolkit was created by the

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT DISASTER RESPONSE COLLABORATIVE





This document is intended for the use of professionals, primarily the 56 federally recognized State and Territorial Domestic Violence Coalitions and Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) State and Territorial Administrators. This document serves as guidance for Coalitions to determine their role in disasters. It also provides key information that will guide Coalitions in the provision of technical assistance and support to member programs while preparing for, during, and in the aftermath of a natural disaster while also mitigating COVID-19.



This document is intended to serve as guidance but is not a step-by-step guide. It represents a plethora of possibilities for how to prepare and respond to natural disasters, but we also acknowledge that many decisions will have to be made intuitively in the moment. Please do what is best when considering the survivors' and advocates'/staff's physical safety, well-being, and confidentiality. While this document focuses on the overlap of natural disasters and COVID-19, we acknowledge that these practices could be useful or applicable to other crisis situations, including those not specific to domestic violence.

This document and other resources can be found in the National Network to End Domestic Violence's Private Resource Library at nnedv.coalitionmanager.org.

Disclaimer: This toolkit was created by advocates for advocates, drawing on prior disaster response experiences across the U.S. It provides options and considerations for organizations developing their disaster response plans. Contributors encourage agencies to consult legal experts and review relevant state, federal, territorial, or tribal regulations and laws before implementing policy changes or personnel decisions related to disaster response.

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BACKGROUND

Over the last two decades, natural disasters and instances of severe weather have become increasingly more frequent (van Daalen et al., 2022). States that anticipate certain disasters are now seeing them more often, and states that historically did not have to worry about natural disasters are not only being affected by them but are being impacted in regions where the chances of a natural disaster had been rare. In the United States in 2022 alone, severe weather and other climate disasters accounted for over 165 billion dollars' worth of damage (Smith, 2023). Climate change has played a key role in the uptick of severe weather events, which has major implications for states' funding for preparedness and protocol in the event of a disaster (Crimmins et. al, 2023). The effects of natural disasters combined with other health crises, specifically COVID-19, have left domestic violence survivors even more vulnerable, often with very limited to no resources.

Natural disasters expose people to a slew of issues such as housing instability, food scarcity, loss or damage to assets, mental and emotional trauma, and so much more. Survivors of domestic violence experience all of these issues at much more elevated levels while still maneuvering through the looming threat of continued violence from their abusive partner. Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita revealed to the public what many advocates already knew to be true: **natural disasters and weather-related crises increase the risk and instances of domestic and sexual violence (Natural Disasters and Gender-Based Violence, n.d.).**

Various reasons such as limited resources (transportation, advocate assistance, housing, finances, etc.) and being displaced have been linked to making survivors more at risk of living in congregate shelter with their abuser. Natural disasters and other weather crises have also been linked to retraumatization due to the uncertainty of safety and stability (Woelfl et al., 2024).

In efforts to minimize the growing harmful effects of natural disasters on survivors, the Office of Family Violence Prevention and Services (OFVPS) has awarded ten million dollars of Family Violence Prevention and Services (FVPSA) Hurricanes Fiona and Ian Domestic Violence Disaster Assistance Supplemental Funding to nine stand-alone Domestic Violence and dual Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault State and Territorial Coalitions and four tribal organizations (OFVPS Family Violence Prevention and Services Act Grants, 2024). Through these funds, the Coalitions will build and expand their preparedness, protocol, and response in the event of a natural disaster.

In the late Fall of 2023, discussions among these nine DV Coalitions, along with the Texas Council on Family Violence, the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the Capacity Technical Assistance (CTA) Team at the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) indicated a clear need: State and Territorial DV Coalitions need more structured guidance on how to prepare and respond to natural disasters, and ways in which they can tailor these guidelines specifically to their states' needs. From there, the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (DVSA) Disaster Response Collaborative was formed in January 2024 to address these needs as well as the sixth pillar – Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Response – of the U.S. National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (U.S. National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, 2023). This Collaborative, composed of leaders in the DVSA movement, aimed to develop guidance for organizations working to end DVSA on responding to and recovering from disasters. **This toolkit is a compilation of the Collaborative's efforts, primarily focused on weather-related disasters and COVID-19.**

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Collaborative met once a month for one hour from February 2024 through December 2024. Each monthly meeting focused on specific areas of disaster preparedness and recovery. The objective of these meetings was to gauge Coalitions' knowledge and experience with natural disasters, locate the gaps in resources, identify other organizations and agencies to include in their disaster plan, and ultimately create a uniform guidance document which can serve as a starting point for State and Territorial DV Coalitions to use as the protocol in the event of a natural disaster and when tailoring their own plan. It was determined that there was specifically a need to identify ways in which Coalitions can work with their state government and FVPSA State Administrators, which the Collaborative hopes to implement in the future.

GENERAL DISASTER PREPARATION

The first step in disaster response is to prepare carefully before a disaster occurs. As preparation begins, grounding in the values and principles of the anti-domestic violence movement can be helpful.

While an agency may face a disaster that is severe enough that preservation of life supersedes all other principles, in most cases, solutions that maintain alignment with the movement's principles and values are possible and preferable. Some of those values are listed below:

- » **Preserving Self-Determination:** Ensuring survivors retain control over their decisions, including during evacuation, sheltering in place, or relocation processes.
- » **Using Trauma-Informed Practices:** Actively working to minimize re-traumatization for survivors and staff by embedding trauma-informed principles in disaster responses.
- » **Maintaining Confidentiality:** Adapting confidentiality practices to disaster circumstances without compromising safety. This may include ensuring secure communication methods during evacuation.
- » **Providing Services to Underserved Populations:** Ensuring the unique needs of all underserved communities as defined by FVPSA to ensure appropriate and relevant resources in disaster planning.

Agencies may also incorporate their own principles and values into disaster planning. The following pages provide a list of options to consider for effective disaster preparation.

APPENDIX A: List of Sections for a Comprehensive Disaster Plan



Review and Update Agency Policies and Procedures

Disasters can impact various aspects of an agency's policies and procedures, including:

- » Personnel policies
- » Confidentiality policies
- » Communication policies
- » Information storage and record retention policies

An agency may choose to either integrate disaster-specific language into its existing policies and procedures or create a separate disaster response policy. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages, and agencies should select the method that best fits their needs.

In either case, agencies should consider including a section in their personnel policy that provides additional paid time off for staff during disasters, beyond standard PTO options. This section should specify who has the authority to declare a paid emergency/disaster day and describe the criteria for making that decision.

APPENDIX B: Sample Policy for Emergency/Disaster Days

This is also an opportunity to review common personnel issues that may arise during and after a disaster, to determine if additional policies are needed. Some situations that often occur include:

- » **Compensation for Extended Leave:** Staff members requiring extended leave for evacuation or personal recovery. It can be important for policies to specify how the agency handles compensation for this time off—whether the leave is company-paid in addition to regular PTO, covered by the employee's own PTO, or unpaid.
- » **Plan for Loss of Contact:** Outline the period for which the agency will hold a position open when contact with a staff member cannot be re-established.
- » **Remote Work Provisions:** Outline expectations for remote work during disasters, including required communication, areas of prioritization, and access to agency systems. Ensure provisions are flexible enough to account for staff unable to work due to lack of power, internet outages, or caregiving responsibilities.
- » **Emergency Staffing Plans:** Develop policies for reassigning roles or responsibilities during disasters to ensure critical functions are maintained.

Develop Disaster Communication Plans for Agency Staff

Creating a disaster communication plan is essential to ensuring quick and accurate information-sharing during an emergency. In a crisis, your agency may face overwhelming demands, and without a clear plan, effective communication can become challenging.

When developing a communication plan, consider addressing communication needs for each stage of disaster—preparation, response, and recovery.

A communication plan should include, at a minimum:

- 1. Contact Information:** A compiled list of contact information for all agency staff, including phone numbers, email addresses, and emergency contacts.
- 2. Review and Update Schedule:** The frequency of updating contact information and the person responsible for maintaining this information. Designate a specific person or team responsible for maintaining accurate contact records and distributing updated lists to key personnel.
- 3. Chain of Command:** A clear communication hierarchy during a disaster, detailing the flow of information from the agency to employees and vice versa.
 - Does each supervisor communicate with their team and relay information to the Executive Director?
 - Will the Executive Director communicate directly with everyone?
 - Will the Executive Director share information on behalf of the agency while employees provide updates to their supervisors?

Agencies should choose the structure that works best for them. Generally, it's recommended to maintain communication practices during disasters that are similar to regular communication methods, as familiarity can be helpful during times of overwhelm.

- 4. Employee Communication Expectations:** Clear guidance on what communication employees can expect and leadership's expectations for employee responses.
- 5. Backup Communication Plans:** Contingency plans for staff to communicate with agency leadership when traditional communication channels are unavailable due to power outages, cellular network disruptions, or other issues. These can include utilizing the agency's communication apps (Teams or other communication app), private messaging the agency's social media accounts, or contacting a pre-arranged third party, such as the coalition. Agencies can also provide staff with a list of pre-determined meeting locations or safe zones where they can report to if they are unable to reach others electronically, if applicable.
- 6. Communications During Recovery:** Include procedures for transitioning from emergency communication modes back to regular operations, ensuring consistency and clarity as staff and operations normalize.

7. Training and Drills: Regularly train staff on the disaster communication plan, simulating real-life scenarios to ensure everyone understands their role and expectations. Use training sessions to address potential challenges.

When creating this plan, agencies should consider the following:

- » Does the plan address the needs of all staff members, including those in satellite or outreach offices, remote workers, mobile advocates, and education or community advocates?
- » Does the plan account for the potential realities of disasters? For instance, staff members may need to evacuate with their families, their homes may sustain damage, they may face other disaster-related challenges that affect their ability to communicate, they may experience stress, trauma, and physical exhaustion, and they may face road closures and damaged infrastructure. To address this, agencies are encouraged to use empathetic language that does not place undue burdens on staff during these difficult times, to provide flexibility, ensure selfcare, and prioritize staff safety.

APPENDIX C: Sample Communication Plan



Review Insurance Policies

Insurance policies can be complex and reviewing them during the aftermath of a disaster can be confusing. In addition to your agency's own overwhelm, insurance companies are often bombarded with requests, and getting an agent to help immediately after a disaster can be difficult to impossible. Take the time now to review your agency's insurance policy, paying special attention to coverage information and information about making a claim.

Most business insurance policies do not cover damage from earthquakes and floods as part of the general policy. In addition, if your building is in a high-risk area, your insurance company may not cover specific risks. For example, insurance policies in areas with a high risk of wildfires often require additional policies for full coverage. Discuss with your insurance agent the specific risks your community is most likely to face and explore additional coverage options as needed.

In addition, some policies have provisions for making claims such as requiring before and after pictures, inventory lists, narrative summaries of damage, or an outside assessment of damage. Some policies require you to make an initial report within a certain time frame (e.g., 48 hours of the incident). Knowing these details ahead of time can help you respond quickly in the case of facility damage.

Regularly review your agency's insurance policies to ensure they remain up-to-date and relevant to your organization's needs. Include your insurance agent in these reviews to clarify ambiguities and discuss potential changes in coverage. Consider revisiting these policies after significant organizational changes, such as facility expansions or new programs, as these may affect your coverage needs.

Complete a centralized insurance toolkit with the following:

- » A copy of your insurance policies and contact information for your insurance agent or provider.
- » Detailed instructions for filing a claim, including any necessary forms and submission methods.
- » A checklist of required documentation and evidence to support a claim.
- » Photos, videos, and/or descriptions of your facility, equipment, and inventory to serve as a baseline documentation.
- » A log for tracking communication with your insurance provider during the claims process.

Once your insurance toolkit is complete, store it in a safe place that is accessible during a disaster. You may also consider storing a copy of important insurance information in a safe deposit box or in another secure, off-site location.

Purchase Disaster Supplies

Emergency management professionals recommend that agencies purchase and store disaster supplies. While the specific supplies you need may differ based on the disasters your community is likely to experience, your facility setup, and your staffing levels, in most cases it is helpful to have at least the following items on hand:

ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES

- » Flashlights or lanterns (consider rechargeable options or have appropriate batteries)
- » First aid kits
- » Face masks, hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes
- » Tool kit (hammer, screwdriver, pliers, etc.)
- » Small solar panels that can charge electronics
- » Radio (battery powered or hand-crank)

To safeguard these supplies, agencies should store them in a water-resistant container or a watertight safe.

FOOD AND WATER SUPPLIES

Professionals also recommend that you have enough food and water to last for three days. The amount of food and supplies to purchase ahead of time can be calculated using the number of people that you usually have in your facility. Plan at least one gallon of water per person per day for drinking water and basic hygiene. Food should be easy-to-prepare, shelf-stable items such as canned goods, energy bars, and dried fruit. Be sure to consider a variety of dietary restrictions in your preparations (vegan, gluten-free, nut-free). Include a can opener with your stored canned goods for accessibility.



Ensure all staff are familiar with the location of the supplies. Incorporate quarterly supply checks into your regular facility maintenance schedule. These checks can provide the opportunity to use items before they expire, replenish needed supplies, and ensure that the storage conditions are maintained properly. Items should be stored in a cool, dry location that is easily accessible during an emergency. Protect items like batteries and electronics from extreme temperatures and moisture.

Invest in Resilient Infrastructure

Frequent utility outages as well as wind, water, and fire damage are common issues across many disasters. Investing in resilient infrastructure can help mitigate these challenges, increasing your agency's ability to continue to function during and after emergencies. When feasible, agencies should invest in backup power solutions like standby generators or solar power systems to mitigate power outages, as well as water filtration and storage systems to ensure access to safe drinking water.

Additionally, investing in structural improvements such as fire-resistant building materials; flood-proofing, inflatable dams, and drainage systems; storm shutters and hurricane-grade windows and doors; and storm shelters can reduce the need for evacuation, improve safety, and minimize damage.

Agencies interested in identifying appropriate options for renovations can contract with an architect who has disaster knowledge to provide recommendations. With limited resources, create a phased plan for implementing improvements over time, focusing first on the highest-risk areas. Update your risk assessment periodically to account for changing disaster patterns and evolving infrastructure needs.

Create Connections with Disaster or Emergency Management Organizations

Sometimes, the best thing we can do to prepare for a disaster is to foster connections with local and national disaster response organizations. These agencies are experts in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery and can be an invaluable resource to your program. Engaging with these organizations and becoming an active part of your overall community's emergency planning response can provide the following benefits:

- » Having access to the most up to date information on the overall community disaster response, including evacuation routes, shelter availability, and resource distribution points.
- » Receiving early warnings and updates about potential risks or hazards, enabling your agency to prepare and respond proactively.
- » Participating in community planning discussions to advocate for the unique needs of survivors within the overall community response, including safety, accessibility, and confidentiality.
- » Providing the opportunity to communicate your agency's confidentiality obligations and privacy requirements and collaborating to ensure these are respected during evacuation or shelter situations.

- » Having the potential to create partnerships or coordinated responses to streamline resource allocation and service delivery, as well as developing mutual aid agreements with other organizations to share resources, expertise, and facilities during disasters.

Below is a list of emergency management organizations that may exist in your community.

Government Emergency Preparedness Officials

In most cases, there is a government official or department in charge of emergency management. This department can exist in your municipal government, county or parish government, or it may be a state level department. Local emergency management agencies can usually be found in any of the below departments:

- » County, parish, or municipal emergency management offices
- » Fire departments and emergency medical services (EMS)
- » Police and sheriff's departments with disaster response teams

Being connected with emergency preparedness officials can help you understand the role government entities will play in disaster response. For example, one agency leader who moved from the North to the South reported that a snowstorm was approaching her area. Coming from the North, she assumed the government response would mitigate the threat. However, she didn't know that the local government lacked snowplows, ice melt for roads, and other essential equipment to address the situation. While snowstorms were a regular occurrence with a well-established response in the North, in the South, a snowstorm shut everything down, including emergency services. Understanding this distinction can significantly impact how an agency prepares.

In some cases, there may be emergency management personnel at each level – city, county, region, and statewide. Regional and statewide agencies can usually be found in government emergency management offices such as:

- » State emergency management agencies (e.g., NC Emergency Management)
- » Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regional offices

<https://www.fema.gov/about/organization/regions>

It can be helpful to form relationships at every level that exists. In some states, emergency coordinators will help nonprofits with personalized response plans for emergencies most likely to happen.



You will likely need to build relationships with these entities. Once the relationships are built, you can begin talking to officials about the specific needs of survivors during disasters. Having meaningful connections with government officials can help to build a long term, sustainable plan that provides survivors with the best possible outcomes.

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs)

Each state, and sometimes specific regions in a state, has a Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) team. VOAD teams are coalitions of agencies and individuals who work in the four phases of disaster management: preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation. If your community has an active VOAD team, it can be quite easy to become involved and get assistance quickly.

Visit the National VOAD website to find contact information for your state or regional VOAD team:

<https://www.nvoad.org/> (VOAD Homepage, n.d.).

American Red Cross

The Red Cross is often at the heart of evacuation efforts. They organize and staff evacuation shelters during many types of emergencies. The Red Cross is usually in close contact with government officials in decision making roles regarding disaster response and have the most up to date information. The Red Cross is an organization that fosters collaboration within communities, which can make connecting with your state or regional Red Cross representative easier. Every state has a Red Cross chapter, and in most cases, different regions across each state have their own chapter as well.

You can find your chapter and location here:

<https://www.redcross.org/find-your-localchapter.html> (Search Red Cross Locations, n.d.).

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

FEMA has a variety of programs designed to support communities during all phases of disaster management. One of their initiatives, the Voluntary Agency Liaison (VAL), works to establish, foster, and maintain relationships among government, voluntary, faith-based, and community partners. There are VAL groups in every state and most work in conjunction with local VOAD teams. VALs act as a bridge between FEMA and community stakeholders, ensuring effective communication and collaboration. VALs assist in forming and strengthening Long-Term Recovery Groups, which focus on rebuilding efforts after disasters. These groups help address unmet needs in the recovery process, such as repairing homes, replacing lost belongings, and providing mental health support. VALs also offer guidance on best practices for disaster response, resource coordination, and the development of recovery strategies tailored to local needs.

<https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/fema-voluntary-agency-liaison>

(FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaison, n.d.).



In addition, FEMA facilitates Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), which are teams of community members at the local level who are educated on emergency preparedness and the community emergency response plan. These local teams are essential components of a community's emergency management system, offering support during disasters and fostering a culture of resilience (IS-317.A, 2020). Through FEMA's National Disaster & Emergency Management University, people have access to varying trainings and curricula to strengthen your knowledge and capabilities in emergency management responsibilities.

<https://training.fema.gov/ndemu/curriculum/> (NDEMU Curriculum & Programs, n.d.).

Army National Guard and Local Law Enforcement

The Army National Guard and Local Law Enforcement officers are the people who will be on the front lines of disaster response and recovery. Their role is critical in implementing disaster plans developed by government officials and ensuring the safety and well-being of affected communities. They can be an important partner for you throughout a disaster cycle, as they assist with evacuation assistance, search and rescue, resource distribution, infrastructure support, and security and order maintenance. Local law enforcement also plays a key role in ensuring community safety and facilitating disaster response efforts, including traffic and crowd control, information dissemination, protection of vulnerable populations, and support for emergency services.

Local Independent Volunteer Groups (if applicable)

You can consider building partnerships with local groups for post-disaster assistance if that is available in your area. An example of a local volunteer group is the Cajun Navy in Louisiana, which consists of individual citizens with personal boats who canvas flooded areas to evacuate people who are not able to leave their homes due to the water levels. Other examples include Search and Rescue Teams (sometimes comprised of local hikers or climbers), Neighborhood Emergency Teams (an informal group of residents that organize to provide first aid, clear debris, or check on vulnerable neighbors), and Specialized Volunteer Networks (who focus on specific needs, such as providing meals, rebuilding homes, or transporting supplies).

Become Familiar with Current Disaster-Related Laws and Procedures

It is important to familiarize yourself with state, territory, or tribal laws about disasters and domestic violence or other crimes. For example, some states may have laws that protect survivors with orders of protection or protect people from eviction during times of disaster. This can be particularly important to understand so that your agency has all of the information needed to assist survivors fully.

Include Disaster-Related Information into Staff Onboarding and Ongoing Training

Disaster can strike with little to no warning. It is crucial that staff members understand their role and responsibilities during these times. Integrating disaster response into staff onboarding and ongoing training ensures preparedness and safety. At a minimum, you should include:

- » Instructions on how to operate critical equipment, such as generators, entrance gates, or telephones particularly during power outages or other disruptions.
- » Clear guidelines on any safety protocols, including evacuations, lockdowns, and other emergency actions.
- » Location of disaster supplies, a list of what is available, and access procedures.
- » Communication protocols, especially for those staff who work alone or without an on-site supervisor such as 24-hour shelter staff, mobile advocates, community education staff, and outreach advocates.

Conducting regular, ongoing staff training on disaster response and equipment operation will prepare your staff. Regular drills and simulations, such as mock disaster scenarios, may help you improve readiness. Including hands-on practice for using emergency tools and equipment (e.g. generators) will help staff feel more prepared.

It is very important to have easily accessible instructions for operating critical systems and equipment during a disaster.

Some agencies report that creating videos or instructional documents to provide information about operating equipment was helpful in ensuring staff could operate protocols, contact lists, and emergency plans in one place. Store all electronic training resources in shared cloud spaces, making them accessible to all staff. Electronically stored instructions should be printed out prior to the disaster so that they can be accessed if the power goes out.

Consider Alternatives to Storing Important Information

The potential to lose all of your important information, both paper and digital, during disasters is high. Agencies should have procedures in place to secure information in ways that will preserve documents in a confidential manner and protect the confidentiality of survivor files during recovery and cleanup.

Agencies can also consider the following:

- » Consult with an IT provider to identify disaster-resilient solutions tailored to your agency's needs. Discuss encryption, cloud solutions, and remote recovery protocols. Set up an incident response plan to ensure smooth recovery postdisaster.
- » Conduct regular, on-site backups of agency computers to hard drives or servers. Ensure all paper documents are scanned and stored digitally within an agreed upon timeframe.
- » Transition to a cloud-based payroll and accounts payable option to manage payroll, invoicing, and accounts payable.
- » External hard drives containing back up information should be stored in a weather and fire-resistant container.
- » Move important documents to the agency location that is most likely to sustain little to no damage during disasters.

When these options are not feasible, agencies should, at a minimum, have policies and procedures in place for the backup and storage of documents that provide for instances of disaster. This will ensure that legal requirements and funder requirements for record retention and confidentiality are upheld.

Coordination with Other Agencies

Domestic violence and other victim service organizations can support each other during disasters to ensure the safety and well-being of survivors. Given the organizations' shared (or similar) mission and expertise, creating reciprocal agreements with one another can help to facilitate a coordinated disaster response. State Coalitions can help with or facilitate this process. You may consider one or both of the following types of agreements:

- » **Crisis Line Agreements:** Develop an agreement regarding crisis line support during evacuations or loss of power. In these agreements, each program can forward their crisis line to the other program until they are able to resume taking calls.
- » **Evacuation Agreements:** Establish agreements for moving survivors in shelter, including transport methods, protocols for information sharing, safety planning, and any needed transfer of funds or supplies. Include provisions for the evacuation of pets when applicable.

Programs who have agreements such as these in place say that having clear instructions on privacy, confidentiality, communication, and sharing information between programs is useful. When agreements include clear guidance about what releases programs need from survivors and how information is

shared, evacuation efforts can happen efficiently while also complying with confidentiality and privacy requirements. To facilitate smooth disaster coordination, train staff and advocates on the specifics of the reciprocal agreements.

APPENDIX F: Sample agreement template for inter-agency collaborations



APPENDIX G: Checklist for moving survivors and staff during an evacuation



You may also consider securing a pre-arranged evacuation location. For example, some programs coordinate with a church or other place of worship to establish an evacuation plan. In such cases, the church would allow the entire shelter to stay in the building during a storm, with no one else allowed. This ensures a private and confidential location for shelter residents.

Having secure and private evacuation locations ensure continuity of care and safety. Another option is entering into formal agreements with hotels to secure the space needed for evacuation. Meet with hotel managers of potential locations now to ensure an agreement is in place before a disaster occurs. Be sure to consider if the location has backup generators or other power sources available to them during a disaster. Verify the space's ability to accommodate children and pets, as well as needs for individuals with disabilities. Further, prioritize religious organizations that are welcoming and affirming to all identities.

Lastly, consider developing partnerships with other entities for supplies or needed items. For example, one program has a partnership with a company that supplies fuel. In the aftermath of a disaster, this resource becomes scarce. Having that partnership allowed for the agency to have a consistent flow of fuel to power their generators. Another program worked with their electric company to classify their shelter program as critical infrastructure within the power grid. This shortened the time that the shelter was without electricity after a weather event. Programs can also consider partnerships with hardware suppliers, grocery stores, pharmacies, and/or service and medical providers to ensure rapid response capabilities.

Develop Contingency Plans for Loss of Facility Systems

Disaster can disrupt critical facility systems that you rely on for operations and safety. These systems may not function as intended without electricity, internet, or due to water infiltration. To prepare, agencies should develop robust contingency plans for system failures and ensure staff are trained to implement them effectively. These plans should be accessible to agency staff who are on-site when a disaster occurs. Below is a guide to consider when creating these plans:

Phone Systems

To ensure crisis lines remain operational, even during disaster, consider the following:

- » Understand how your phone system will react to disruptions (e.g. IP-based)
- » Understand the process you will need to follow to forward your phone line. This process is different depending on your phone provider and the type of phone you have. Some processes require your phone to be functioning or require you to log into an internet-based account to forward. Some have an option for staff to call in so that the phone company's staff can assist with forwarding. Be sure to ask about the information your staff will need to access assistance (i.e. agency password or PIN for the phone account).
- » Establish procedures for forwarding phone lines to an alternative number or device when forwarding your crisis line is something you need to do.
- » Consider:
 - Where will phone lines be forwarded?
 - Who is responsible for forwarding them?
 - What are the pros and cons of forwarding calls to somewhere outside the area impacted by the disaster? Would this require an agreement with another agency?
 - What confidentiality protocols will be followed if calls are answered off-site?

Some programs keep a pre-paid cell phone that can be used for this purpose. In this instance, the crisis line can be forwarded to the cell phone which can be answered by agency staff in the office or remotely. Agencies that serve large geographic areas may have one office or location outside of the affected areas where the crisis line can be forwarded. Others have mutual agreements with sister agencies for crisis line forwarding. And lastly some programs report forwarding their crisis line to the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

When the crisis line is forwarded to a cell phone, ensure that your agency has procedures for answering calls including how to handle multiple calls at a time, and the transfer procedure for when the staff member who has the phone needs to sleep or have a break.

Drive-Through or Walk-In Entrance Gates

- » Determine if your entrance gates will stay open or locked during a power loss, and what happens once it is turned back on. With a power loss, some gates will automatically open and stay opened until power is restored. Some will automatically lock closed and cannot be opened using the normal functions. Do you know which will happen?
- » If your gate stays open – Plan for facility safety in the event this occurs.
- » If your gate stays closed – All gates should have a manual override to operate the gate without electricity. Staff should know how to do this and have the proper tools necessary to manually open the gate if needed.

Security Systems Including Cameras

- » Understand how your security system and cameras will react to disruptions in power and internet.
- » Identify alternate monitoring options for staff when security cameras are offline when these options are feasible and do not interfere with survivors' right to privacy. In disasters, monitoring may not always be possible; however, it is important to understand what will happen and to ensure on-site staff understand the expectations for monitoring.

Electronic Door Locks (doors with key card, key fob, or code entry)

- » Verify whether locks automatically unlock during power outages. In most cases, the fire marshal or other regulatory body will require that the electronic locks automatically unlock and remain unlocked when the power is out.
- » Maintain physical key backups for electronic door locks when possible. Ensure they are stored securely, clearly labeled for easy access, and include clear instructions for using the key manually.
- » Adjust security protocols for unlocked doors to maintain safety. Ensure changes in safety protocols are communicated to all staff and shelter residents.

Fire Alarms and Sprinkler Systems

- » Understand how fire alarms and sprinklers will respond during power loss.
- » Prepare for the possibility of sprinkler activation, even without a fire. This can be a common occurrence during disasters.
- » Include maintenance protocols to mitigate water damage from accidental activations.
- » Communicate in advance with staff and clients on-site about possible activation of sprinklers and alarms and how they should respond.

In addition, provide instructions to staff on where backup equipment is stored and how to operate it. Some examples of common backup equipment are:

Standby Portable Generators

- » Train staff on proper setup and operation.
- » Ensure an adequate supply of fuel, stored safely.
- » Have preventative maintenance agreement in place for standby/stationary generators.

Gas Stoves (cooking and heating)

- » Train staff on how to light gas stoves without electricity.

Pre-Paid Cell Phone (for the quick routing of the crisis line)

- » Designate a responsible party to maintain, charge, store, and ensure minutes are available.
- » Provide written confidentiality expectations for answering the crisis line off-site.

Lighting

- » Stock flashlights, lanterns, and extra batteries in accessible locations. Consider a variety of options, both battery and solar charge.
- » Distribute to shelter residents prior to the disaster.

If your agency has a basement or storm cellar that is typically used for storage, it's important to consider how and whether you will utilize that space in the event of a disaster. You may want to establish a protocol for removing items from that space when a threat is imminent.

Some people decide to install standby generators that automatically power the whole facility when power is lost, or they install solar panels to maintain essential services during power outages. Some install inflatable dams to lessen the likelihood of flooding or install whole home water filtration systems to ensure access to safe drinking water. As stated above, if you decide to equip your building with these items, consider updating your training processes for agency staff members to include how to operate these systems, if needed.

Staff Preparedness

DV programs that have experienced disasters report that the ability for staff to work remotely during and after a disaster helped with continuity of their programs' vital services. Having staff members operating in different locations can ensure that crisis lines remain operational, even if shelters are evacuated or closed. Investing in remote work infrastructure and ensuring staff are equipped to operate from different locations can enhance operational continuity. When using this option, agencies should ensure that their confidentiality and data privacy policies address staff responsibilities for maintaining confidentiality when

working remotely. Programs should also keep in mind and develop policies regarding the continuation to employ and pay staff who cannot work remotely because of their job duties (i.e. keeping shelter staff on payroll in the instance that a shelter building is destroyed and there is not yet an alternate location).

Consider Setting Aside Unrestricted Funds

Access to unrestricted funds can make a significant difference when a disaster is imminent. These funds allow for quick decision-making and flexible resource allocation, addressing the unique and often urgent needs that arise in each situation. Having funds available to cover whatever is needed, without the delay of a lengthy approval process or funder restrictions, can be crucial. Consider the following:

» Establish an Emergency Fund for Disasters

- Set aside a portion of unrestricted funds specifically for disaster response.
- Regularly review and replenish the fund to maintain readiness.

» Simplify Approval Process

- Develop a streamlined internal process for accessing and using these funds during emergencies.
- Empower designated staff or leadership to make quick decisions within defined parameters. Set thresholds for quickly approving costs below a predetermined dollar amount and procedures for approving higher cost items.

» Document Spending Guidelines

- Create clear policies on how unrestricted funds can be used in disaster scenarios.
- Ensure flexibility while maintaining accountability for financial decisions.

» Advocate for Donations and Grants

- Emphasize the importance of unrestricted funds when seeking support from donors and grantors.
- Share examples of how such funds have been used effectively in the past.

» Ensure Accountability and Evaluate Effectiveness

- Keep detailed records of all expenditures while recognizing that traditional methods of record-keeping and documentation may not be accessible during and after a disaster. Provide staff with alternate methods for documenting expenditures, e.g. text or email receipts, cell phone photos of paper receipts or invoices, etc.
- Conduct a post-disaster review to evaluate the fund's impact and identify areas for improvement.
- Share outcomes with partners and stakeholders to build best practices.

Assisting Survivors with Planning

When a disaster is imminent, speak with survivors in shelter about evacuation options. This proactive conversation should be approached thoughtfully, ensuring it aligns with trauma-informed care and prioritizes survivor autonomy. Advocates should avoid having these discussions when a survivor is feeling overwhelmed by other stressors.

Each agency should decide if they prefer to speak with survivors individually or in a group setting, such as a house meeting. When advocates meet with survivors individually, it is important that they are provided with a form, a document, or other guidance to ensure that all advocates are covering the same general information with survivors.

APPENDIX H: Advocate Conversation Guide



CONSIDERATIONS FOR PREPARATION WHEN A DISASTER IS IMMINENT

Disasters generally fall into two categories:

1. those that give notice, and
2. those that occur suddenly with little to no warning

When we have notice, we can use that time to make informed decisions about our agency's response. Below are key considerations and actionable steps to guide your preparations:

Monitoring and Decision-Making

Stay informed of the risk by monitoring emergency alerts. Pay attention to watches and warnings issued by weather forecasters, government-issued office closures, and government-issued evacuation orders, which may be voluntary or mandatory.

Likely, one of the biggest decisions you will have to make in the face of a disaster is whether to evacuate. It's important to have a process in place to help determine your agency's response. Here are some things to consider.

- » **Authority:** Clearly define who has the authority to make evacuation decisions (e.g., Executive Director, Board of Directors). Ensure the Executive Director understands the board's expectations from them in a disaster. Ideally, the board will give the Executive Director full authority to make decisions before, during, and after the disaster, including evacuation.
- » **Timeline for making an evacuation decision:** In order to safely evacuate, a decision has to be made in enough time to activate your evacuation procedures and complete them prior to the disaster's start.
- » **What factors will you use to determine evacuation status?** Programs can include factors like disaster severity and dangerousness, predicted affected locations, safety of survivors and staff, staffing levels, government orders or recommendations, proximity to emergency services, relocation options available, costs of evacuation, and transportation to carry out evacuation activities, along with the estimated time the facility may experience a loss of power or water.

Some people also consider informal methods of decision-making based on the historical knowledge of your community. For example, one program reported that they "watched the river" to decide when evacuation was necessary because they knew once the river got to a certain height, the likelihood of flooding significantly increased. Programs should consider developing and adopting a decision matrix to help guide them through this process.

It may also be helpful to familiarize yourself with community partners' plans. Does the courthouse intend to remain open? Are other agencies in your community evacuating? The availability of other services in your community may also weigh into your agency's evacuation decision.

Agencies should make a thoughtful decision about what is best for their organization. If after reviewing the current situation, you are questioning whether you should evacuate or not, err on the side of caution and evacuate. Always follow government evacuation orders.

- » **Disaster teams:** Some organizations, particularly ones with a large number of staff members, create a disaster team within their organization who are in charge of coordinating disaster efforts, including evacuation. Responsibilities may include monitoring conditions, managing evacuation logistics, and ensuring effective communication. Include team members with decision-making authority and operational knowledge. If possible, ensure representation from all key departments or program areas.

Evacuation Planning for Survivors in Shelter During Disasters

Once a decision has been made to evacuate, there are several things to consider. Due to the unique safety considerations for survivors, programs are encouraged to secure evacuation options that are the safest for survivors when possible. Safer options are:

- » Other victim service agencies
- » Hotels
- » Evacuation to a private location (only shelter residents with no other evacuees)

When these options are not available and a program needs to utilize government evacuation options, it is strongly recommended that programs provide safety planning services to survivors prior to evacuation.

Reach out to your State Administrator as they sometimes have information on government evacuation options before they go out to the general public, and they may be able to assist with coordinating special considerations for survivors within the government evacuation response.

Consider ways your program can assist survivors in using their support systems for evacuation. When the option is available, most survivors will prefer to stay with their families during a disaster. The program can provide assistance with transportation, supplies, or direct financial support to help survivors connect with their support system. In some cases, a family member may be able to house a survivor and their family during the storm but may lack enough food, hygiene supplies, or other necessities. Your agency can consider providing these items in such circumstances.



Determine your agency's capacity to provide evacuation assistance and who is eligible for assistance, e.g. current shelter and non-residential survivors, shelter survivors only, etc. When a disaster is imminent, it can be easy to focus on assisting only shelter survivors; however, it is likely that you will begin receiving requests for assistance from existing, past, or new outreach survivors. Decide if your agency will provide evacuation assistance to:

- » Survivors living in your shelter
- » Survivors living in other agency owned buildings (i.e. transitional housing facilities)
- » Survivors in agency-run housing projects (i.e. scattered site transitional housing, rapid re-housing units, etc.)

- » Non-residential survivors receiving outreach services
- » Survivors requesting services for the first time



When time and resources are limited, programs may consider tiering the assistance available to non-shelter survivors. Here are some possible options for assistance a program can provide when they are not able to give the same level of services to all survivors they serve, due to limited resources or other barriers:

- » Sharing information on evacuation options and tips on what to bring.
- » Providing assistance with creating individualized evacuation and communication plans.
- » Connecting survivors who are evacuating to one another, when requested and with permission, so that no one is alone.
- » Doing safety planning for survivors facing additional risks – including discussing safety in the case of their abusive partner being in the same evacuation shelter as they are. In addition, it is important to discuss safety options for survivors who are sheltering in place with their abuser. They may not have access to emergency responses or other outside assistance if an incident occurs during the height of the disaster. It is important to discuss this possibility with survivors as part of safety planning.
- » Offering supplies such as diapers, formula, non-perishable food, water, hygiene items, go bags, etc.
- » Providing assistance with transportation to evacuation locations.



Other evacuation details to consider are as follows:

- » Decide whether agency staff will travel with survivors to evacuation locations (other shelters or hotels).
- » Maintain confidential records of where each survivor is going to ensure accountability and coordination.
- » Develop transportation strategies to help survivors return from evacuation locations once it's safe.
- » Address accommodations for survivors with pets by locating pet-friendly evacuation options.
- » Assist survivors in carrying or securely storing vital documents, such as: orders of protection, custody papers, and birth certificates.
- » Plan for survivors with unique needs, such as: Limited English Proficiency, disabilities, chronic or serious health conditions, and children with special needs. They may need more proactive communication from you, for example, or additional assistance in planning for evacuation. Consider that emergency alerts are mostly in English and programs should think about special outreach to survivors who don't speak English.

Evacuating to another domestic violence shelter

There are additional things to consider when evacuating to another DV shelter. For the purpose of this section, the following terms will be used:

1. **Home program:** the program that is evacuating
2. **Host program:** the program accepting evacuees

DOCUMENTS AND FILES

- » Document sharing: In this situation, it can be tricky to determine what documents to share. Some agencies consider sending the entire survivor file to the host program. While this is an option, it is not recommended. Should you decide that this is the best option, home programs should keep in mind that the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) requirements for informed consent of sharing information still apply in this situation. Programs must get signed, informed consent from survivors before sharing client files.
- » It is recommended that home programs only share a minimal amount of identifying information about survivors with host programs. Any identifying information shared, even if it is minimal, can only happen with the consent of the survivor.
- » It is not recommended that a host program complete a new intake with the survivors from the home program. This places an undue burden on the survivors who are already in a state of extreme overwhelm. It is recommended that the host program use an agreed upon form to obtain information needed for statistical purposes.

APPENDIX I: A sample survivor information form

TRANSPORTATION AND RESOURCES

- » Discuss transportation responsibilities with the host program. In most cases, the home program will provide transportation; however, it can be a significant help to the home program for the host program to assist with transportation when possible.
- » Discuss food, supplies, or financial resources the home program may be able to provide to the host program to assist with the added costs of housing the additional survivors.

SERVICE PROVISION

- » The home and host programs should establish expectations for service provision from both agencies. In most cases, stays at a host program will be short-term (less than five days), so host programs may only need to address immediate advocacy concerns. To avoid confusion between the programs and survivors, it can be helpful to discuss service provision ahead of time.

- » Every program is different. Shelter spaces are set up differently, the way services are provided may vary, and the actual services offered can differ. It is important for home program staff to understand these differences so they can give survivors a general overview of the host shelter before evacuation. This helps survivors make informed decisions. For example, survivors evacuating from a home program with private bedrooms may choose not to evacuate to a host program with dorm/communal-type bedrooms.
- » It is also important to establish mechanisms for ongoing collaboration between advocates at the home program and the host program. While the advocates at the host program will be in direct contact with survivors, the existing relationships with advocates at the home program will be important to maintain. Consistency and connection are especially important for trauma survivors. The programs should discuss if continued contact or support between the home program advocates and evacuated survivors is feasible and establish methods for communication, if applicable.

CRISIS LINE

Implement your contingency plans for crisis line operation. Prior to any external forwarding, agencies should obtain permission from the agency to which they intend to forward their crisis line.

Evacuating to Hotels

Consider the following:

- » How will you ensure that survivors have access to food and other essential resources?
- » Will staff members stay at the hotel with survivors?
- » Will each survivor get their own hotel room or will people share? If survivors/families share hotel rooms, how will they be “paired” up?
- » How will you transport survivors to the hotel?
- » What are the total estimated hotel costs, hotel’s required method of payment, and your agency’s available funding, available credit card limit, and cash flow to cover the potentially large expense?

Evacuating to a Non-Victim Service Pre-Set Location (e.g., a church)

When you have an existing agreement to evacuate survivors to a location other than a DV shelter or hotel and a disaster is imminent, consider the following:

- » Check in with the location about the details, your agency’s responsibilities, and their expectations for the stay.
- » Determine the staff members who will stay at the location with survivors, as it is likely the location will require staff presence.
- » Determine what you need to bring. Does the location have beds, pillows, blankets, food, hygiene items, etc.?

- » Agree on a compensation plan.
- » Determine who will be responsible for cleaning up so that you leave the location in the state in which you entered it.

Transportation Options

One of the biggest challenges of evacuation is transportation. Evacuations often require transporting large numbers of people in a short amount of time. Below are options that programs have used to coordinate transportation to evacuate:

- » Provide gas cards to survivors who have their own vehicles or who have family that can transport them with assistance.
- » Provide additional gas cards, gift cards, or other incentives to survivors who are willing to help transport other survivors to evacuation locations.
- » Use agency vehicles to transport people to safe locations. Ensure vehicles are regularly maintained, fueled, and ready for emergency use. Equip vehicles with first aid kits, water, snacks, and emergency supplies.
- » Use ride share or taxi options for emergency transport. Establish agreements ahead of time to ensure availability and prioritizing of the program's needs, if possible.
- » Allow staff members who own insured, reliable vehicles to transport survivors. Provide mileage reimbursement and/or other incentives. Ensure your agency insurance policies cover this type of transportation.
- » Collaborate with government facilitated transportation options (i.e. evacuation buses).

Relaying Information to Agency Staff Members

Once you have determined the evacuation location options and the level of assistance your agency can provide to survivors, the next step is to relay that information to your agency staff members. It is recommended that you do this in-person or via an online platform, through a meeting when possible. When meeting with agency staff, you may consider discussing the following agency business along with the procedures for survivors:

- » Reviewing the agency's communication plan and updating contact information as needed.
- » Agency protocols for backing up/securing data.
- » Communicating the staff's role in the physical preparation of the property. Preparation of the property is discussed in more detail later in this document.
- » Any staffing requirements, either on-site or remotely, before, during, or after the disaster.
- » The responsibilities of staff during and immediately following the disaster, if any. You may want to discuss the equipment and/or documents that you want staff members to bring with them and what

they should leave at the office. This may differ per staff member depending on their own evacuation plans, location of their homes, role within the agency, etc.

- » Any differences in requirements for those who work from home, or in satellite/outreach offices.
- » Procedures around canceling or rescheduling upcoming appointments, meetings, trainings, events, etc.

You will also want to discuss the evacuation assistance plans for survivors with agency staff. Inform them of evacuation decisions, protocols, and available assistance for survivors and the staff's role in the coordination of these services. Discuss the difficult possibility of survivors choosing to return to their abusive partner as their evacuation plan. This can sometimes be difficult for staff members to accept, and they may need space to process their feelings. While we do not want to minimize the emotional toll this may take on staff members, this can be an opportunity to discuss survivor autonomy and the importance of knowing that survivors are the only ones capable of determining the best decisions for their lives.

While conducting this meeting, acknowledge the difficulties of staff helping survivors in crisis while they and their family are also being impacted. Address potential stressors and encourage open dialogue about these challenges. Agencies can consider incorporating appreciation for their staff members' efforts into the meeting. Express gratitude for staff dedication and resilience during the disaster, and provide support and flexibility as they recover from the disaster. The agency staff can then begin meeting with shelter survivors regarding their options.

See [Appendix G](#) referenced above for conversation guidance for advocates.

Sheltering in Place

When deciding not to evacuate during a disaster, agencies must prepare to maintain the safety and well-being of survivors and staff on-site. Below are recommendations and best practices for managing a shelter-in-place situation effectively:

- » Review and replenish your emergency supplies to ensure that you have enough food, water, medicine, and other items needed for the duration of the disaster. You can consider the possibility of partnering with a food bank to stock up on food. Plan for at least 72 hours of provisions per person, including special consideration for infants, individuals with dietary restrictions, or medical needs.
- » Consider the risks and benefits of notifying local authorities so that they can increase the police presence in case of security system failure.
- » Identify locations within your facility for staff and survivors to remain safer, particularly if conditions worsen quickly or with no notice. Designate interior rooms, basements, or storm shelters as safe locations during worsening conditions. Ensure these spaces are accessible and clear of storage or clutter to maximize capacity. Relay that information to staff and survivors who will remain on-site.
- » Ensure survivor autonomy is respected by notifying survivors that their bed space will remain available to them if they choose to personally evacuate for the duration of the disaster.

- » For agencies that have basements or storm shelters, that also use that space for storage, consider clearing out any stored items or otherwise making the space accessible. Check for vulnerabilities in windows, doors, and roof areas.
- » Foster a sense of calm by convening a meeting with staff and survivors to discuss the shelter-in-place plan and ensuring open communication.

Staffing When Sheltering-In-Place

Managing staff during a shelter-in-place situation requires thoughtful planning to ensure staff well-being, adequate support for survivors, and adherence to trauma-informed principles. Below are key considerations and recommendations:

- » Have at least two staff members stay on-site through the duration of the disaster. This will allow for shift work so that staff can get rest. It is not recommended to attempt shift changes during a disaster. Staff who are on-site should expect to remain at the program 24 hours a day for the duration of the event, even if it is multiple days.
- » Identify a space in your shelter that can be modified as a staff rest area for the duration of the disaster. Provide an air mattress and bedding for them to sleep on and hygiene items (toothbrushes, bath/shower supplies, etc.).
- » Consider allowing staff who are staying at the shelter to bring their children, spouse or partner(s), and pets with them. This can be important to staff who do not want to be apart from their families during a trying time. This can reduce staff anxiety and improve focus on survivor care. Plan for designated spaces or guidelines to ensure this arrangement does not disrupt operations and is aligned with your organization's confidentiality procedures.
- » Consider offering hazard pay or additional pay, such as bonuses, for staff working during the disaster; you must have a policy in place before the disaster to allow for this type of compensation. Decide whether staff will be paid 24 hours a day or only the time they are on an active shift. Review and comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements to ensure that your agency is meeting the minimum requirements of the Act for overtime pay and minimum wage rules, and check that your compensation policies are in compliance with grant conditions.
- » Consider giving the staff member(s) who stay on-site the authority to make any decisions necessary during the disaster. Or, in the alternate, ensure that at least one official decision-maker for your agency is always on site. This is important in case of phone outages, power outages, etc. that may make communication with leaders impossible for on-site staff. Some programs choose to leave decision matrixes or other guidance for staff to assist with decision-making; however, someone on-site needs to be able to make a quick decision about how to proceed, using your organization's overarching guidance, without the fear of repercussions.

» Prepare staff for common challenges:

- Train staff on how to operate equipment, such as generators or water systems, before the disaster.
- Provide guidance on what to do when utilities/water go out.
- Ensure staff know where supplies are stored and how to access them.
- Review procedures for adjusting security systems when cameras are down, gates are open, or doors are unlocked.
- Prepare staff for stronger-than-usual survivor reactions due to extreme weather, darkness, and fear. Offer coping strategies and mental health resources to staff to manage their own triggers.
- Acknowledge the difficulty of staff balancing personal safety, survivor care, and disaster management.
- Prepare staff to support survivor autonomy, even if it means survivors leaving the shelter when conditions are dangerous.
 - ♦ Consider speaking to on-site staff about this before leaving. Here is an example of a way to start the conversation: “In situations like these, survivors may make decisions that we personally would not make. It’s normal to have strong feelings about this, but it is important that you maintain our organization’s values and respect their autonomy. For example, if a survivor chooses to leave the shelter at any time, even if conditions are unsafe, that is their choice to make, and we should honor that while offering any support they might request.”

Rapidly Worsening Conditions

While this is less common, it is still important to think about. You may decide to shelter in place with a small staff and the weather conditions may be worse than anticipated. In these instances, things such as water rushing into the building, trees falling on the building, windows breaking from wind, or some other very dangerous condition may occur, and staff members may have to make decisions that preserve life. It can be helpful to think through possible solutions to the conditions you think are the most likely to occur and brainstorm options with the staff who are staying on-site.

These conditions may be so dangerous that mandatory evacuations or volunteer evacuations take place. Assure staff members on-site that in these situations, they can and should cooperate fully with these evacuation efforts, as preserving life is the priority.

Physical Preparation

Whether you are evacuating or sheltering in place, there are some physical preparations to consider to minimize damage and ensure safety. Below is a comprehensive guide for disaster-related physical preparation:

- » When the threat includes the possibility of heavy rain, review your property's drainage.
 - Inspect ditches, gutters, and drainage pipes to ensure they are clear of debris.
 - Remove grass clippings, branches, or leaves that could clog up your drainage paths.
 - If needed, dig temporary drainage ditches to redirect water away from the building prior to the storm, if possible.
- » Place sandbags at the entrances of doors.
- » Secure outdoor furniture, decorations, and other objects that may fly away in heavy wind.
- » Remove dead trees and large branches to reduce the risk of them falling onto the building.
- » Consider the threat of windows breaking, particularly if the threat involves high winds. You can consider boarding them, placing large objects like furniture inside in front of the windows, or moving all items that are inside near windows to minimize the items damaged if the window breaks.
- » In offices, pick equipment up off of the ground and put trash bags or other water-resistant material over printers, computers, etc.
- » Unplug as many things as possible, especially equipment, to prevent damage from a power surge.
- » Fill empty bowls with water and place them into the freezer to keep the freezer cooler longer during power outages.
- » Fill bathtubs with water to use for flushing toilets by pouring a bucket of water in the toilet bowl, should you lose power.
- » Put food that is in a refrigerator or freezer into trash bags, Ziploc bags, etc. This will make for easy clean up if the power is out and the food spoils.
- » Secure any items that may fly away, such as papers, pens, or other supplies that are on desks in desk drawers, filing cabinets, or storage containers.
- » Tape any drawers of unlocked desks or filing cabinets closed.
- » Secure any on-site servers in elevated, water-resistant locations.
- » If you are evacuating the building completely, right before leaving:
 - Turn off water, gas valves, air conditioner, etc.

- Consider using padlocks or chained locks for the doors/gate to secure the building. This can be important for facilities with electronic locks that require electricity. Padlocks can protect your property from looters or theft if electronic locks fail.
- Ensure a member of the agency's leadership team has a physical copy of the agency's insurance policies when evacuating.

OTHER PREPARATION

- » Gas up all agency vehicles so they have full tanks. Fill spare gas containers for use in generators, vehicles, or other critical equipment such as chainsaws.
- » Contact any key stakeholders to notify them of your evacuation status and/or plans to shelter in place. This may include your state administrators, key funders, or your state coalition. Some funders require notification, particularly for evacuation, therefore, you should carefully review your contracts to ensure you are complying with notification requirements. Ensure this list is in a visible place or a location that staff can easily access.
- » Consider your public-facing response. Update your website and/or social media to inform survivors and community members about changes in service delivery. Include whether the shelter is open or closed, alternate contact methods, and any delays or interruptions in services. Use clear, empathetic language to reassure survivors their safety and well-being remain priorities.
- » Determine how you will run payroll or pay other time sensitive invoices when you are away from the office, if necessary.

RECOVERY AFTER A DISASTER

After the dangerous conditions of a disaster pass, the recovery phase can begin. The following pages provide detailed steps to guide your agency through disaster recovery effectively.

Immediate Communication and Staff Relief

Your first priority is to initiate your agency's communication plan and to send replacements to relieve any staff who have stayed on-site through the disaster.

- » Notify staff, survivors, and key stakeholders that the dangerous conditions have passed.
- » Update staff about the status of operations and recovery plans.
- » Provide survivors with updates regarding shelter services and next steps.
- » Check in on the health and status of staff, volunteers, and if possible, clients.
- » Send replacements for staff who stayed on-site to allow them rest and recover.
- » Ensure the replacement team is briefed on current conditions and immediate tasks.

Damage Assessment

Only assess property once it is safe to do so. Use caution when entering buildings that may have sustained structural damage. Once deemed safe, conduct a thorough assessment of the property. Assess property damage at all physical locations, looking for both immediate threats and long-term structural issues. In some cases, disaster conditions may activate sprinkler systems or other emergency building contingencies, which can cause water damage, or cause water damage to items or areas of the building that otherwise may not have sustained water damage directly from the disaster. Take pictures and videos to submit with insurance claims. Upon assessment, you may determine any of the following:

- » The building has sustained little to no damage and it is safe to resume operations.
- » The building has some minor damage, but it is safe to resume full or partial operations if areas can be used safely.
- » The building has some major damage, and you feel that a professional assessment is needed prior to determining if operations can resume.
- » The building has extensive damage and cannot be used until repairs are made.

Evaluate the utility availability. Although the disaster is over, electricity, water, internet, phone systems, or security systems may still be unavailable. These outages and the estimated time to re-establish these services are factors to consider when determining whether to return to the property.

Additionally, you will need to assess the level of available staff.

At times, you may have people in shelter, and upon completing an assessment you determine that the building is damaged to the point that it is unsafe to continue sheltering. Here are a few things to consider:

- » If the building is deemed unsafe for sheltering, consider the evacuation options above to determine an evacuation plan. Relocate survivors to pre-arranged alternative locations, such as partner agencies, hotels, or community shelters.

- » Obtain a professional assessment quickly so that construction or renovations can start before the rush begins post-disaster.
- » Submit all required documentation to insurance companies promptly. Keep copies of all correspondence and receipts related to recovery.
- » Vet all contractors or construction companies prior to contracting. Fraud increases significantly after disasters, and there are many stories of people who have lost thousands of dollars to people who posed as contractors to scam people. Require references, certificates, and written contracts to avoid scams.
- » Many funders require notifications for significant changes in shelter operations. Be sure to contact funders and your state coalition to notify them of your plan and get the approval in writing.
- » Based on the experiences of the working group, when gauging the timeline of recovery, double the amount of time you believe it will take to be fully operational again. For example, if the contractor says that it will take two weeks to complete renovations, you should expect it to take four weeks at a minimum. After a disaster, there is commonly a shortage of supplies and laborers, and while the intent is to follow the timeline, realistically, it is just not possible in most cases.
- » Create a phased plan to resume operations, starting with critical services. Communicate realistic expectations to staff, survivors, and stakeholders.

Assessing Your Staff's Capacity

It is likely that your staff members are also personally affected by the disaster. They may have lost or sustained significant damage to their homes and/or vehicles, or they may have evacuated and are not able to return to the area due to road closures or unsafe conditions. They may have no power or water at their homes, and in extreme situations, they may have experienced the loss of people in their families or communities. It is important for leaders to consider the totality of the staff member's experiences when making determinations about the expectations for employees.

Using a trauma-informed response that takes into account each staff member's life circumstances is encouraged. Using an individualized response, staff members are invited to describe what their capacity is and encouraged to honestly share their current limitations and needs through one-on-one check-ins. The program should work to offer options that accommodate individual circumstances, such as remote work for staff unable to commute, flexible work arrangements (work location, schedules) for staff members who are personally impacted by the disaster, and adjusted duties to reduce physical or emotional strain. Some staff members may need to receive paid leave, while others may be able to come in. Consider extending or increasing paid leave options to ensure staff do not feel pressured to return before they are ready. Programs should offer access to counseling services and resources to assist staff in managing stress, grief, and recovery since surviving a disaster can be a traumatic experience.

Many programs that have experienced disaster report a large staff turnover in the aftermath due to burnout, trauma, or relocation. Focus on maintaining open communication and demonstrating flexibility and care to build loyalty. Be transparent with staff about the organization's recovery plans and ensure decisions about work arrangements and leave are consistent and fair to avoid resentment and confusion. If turnover occurs, prepare for recruitment efforts by outlining temporary or long-term staffing needs. Collaborate with other agencies or networks for short-term staffing support if needed.

Creating Your Recovery Plan

Once you have assessed the situation fully, you can begin to plan your agency's recovery. A comprehensive recovery plan is essential for guiding your agency's return to normal operations after a disaster. Keep in mind that the needs of your program and community in the aftermath of a disaster can be different from before the disaster, requiring a flexible and trauma-informed approach. For example, you can expect an increase in the number of people reaching out to your program for assistance, an increased need for shelter, housing support, emotional support, childcare support (if daycares and schools are closed) and financial assistance.

You will need to evaluate whether professionals are needed for physical recovery tasks or if you will utilize staff members to assist with cleanup of program facilities or in overall community rebuilding. Utilizing staff members for physical recovery work can be an option when professionals have long waiting periods and the damage incurred is minimal or moderate. When you do utilize staff in this capacity, here are some things to consider:

- » Set boundaries and expectations by clearly outlining tasks staff may be asked to perform (clearing debris, cleaning, organizing), and clearly communicating these to staff, ensuring they know what is and what is not expected.
- » Allow staff to describe their capacity and work with them to determine tasks they can reasonably handle. Provide opportunities for staff to express concerns or opt out of tasks they cannot perform. Provide alternative roles for staff unable or unwilling to perform physical tasks.
- » Provide PPE (masks, gloves, other equipment) for tasks that may potentially be hazardous.
- » Train staff on identifying and reporting hazardous conditions, such as mold or structural instability.
- » Consider offering hazard pay or other incentives to staff performing physical recovery work.
- » Offer basic training on safe cleanup practices, ensure staff are trained on handling any hazardous materials, and maintain documentation of cleanup protocols and staff responsibilities to reduce liability risks.

As with the preparations, a multifaceted and flexible response is encouraged. Using such a response, staff members would describe what their capacity is, and the program will work with that to the best of their ability. Staff members who are not able to complete physical cleanup tasks may be able to answer the crisis line, check in with survivors, or make calls to obtain supplies.

Programs that have experienced disaster report an increase in families of staff members volunteering to assist with physical recovery. While this is mostly welcomed, agencies should ensure they have proper protocols in place to ensure confidentiality is upheld and liability risks are minimized.

Recovery Process

Recovering from a disaster requires a strategic approach that prioritizes survivor needs, staff capacity, and operation continuity. Below is a detailed framework to guide your agency through this phase:

Reestablishing Physical Locations

When you have a safe physical location and the staff members needed to maintain basic shelter operations, you can begin the process of reuniting with evacuated survivors using the same methods utilized during evacuation.

In the event that you have a building that is unsafe to use, you can begin seeking alternative locations. Some options to consider are:

- » Utilizing remote work options for administrative staff and/or other staff as appropriate.
- » Contacting local libraries, churches, community colleges, or partner agencies to inquire about a space in their buildings to conduct non-residential services temporarily.
- » Contacting hotels or other entities listed above to discuss alternative sheltering options. Keep in mind that hotels often fill up quickly after a disaster since more people, including relief workers, are seeking places to stay.

Service Continuity

Consider if adjustments need to be made to your service provision. When your staff members or physical locations are affected, you may have to prioritize the most critical services that your agency will provide and continue restoring additional services as your agency builds capacity.

- » **Crisis Line:** Create plans for continued crisis line operation, such as forwarding lines internally or externally.
- » **Advocacy Services:** Survivors might not be able to get to services or your properties may be damaged. When traditional advocacy services cannot be maintained, programs can consider providing mobile advocacy services, or in cases where power and internet are widely available, remote services may be an option.
- » **Safety Planning:** Safety planning after a disaster can look a bit different. After a disaster, survivors may experience:
 - Loss of access to courthouses, which impairs filing orders of protection or other emergency orders.
 - First responders being overwhelmed by disaster recovery efforts and are unable to respond quickly or even at all.

- The survivor may be in a physical location that is inaccessible and therefore they are not able to physically leave the situation.

Programs should prepare their staff members for these calls. Staff members should be prepared to talk with survivors about their options to remain as safe as possible when no outside help is available and they are in a space with the person causing them harm.

- » **Shelter:** Programs should anticipate survivors needing shelter for longer periods of time in the aftermath of a disaster. Access to employment, childcare, housing, etc. are all delayed or paused, and therefore, it will take much longer for survivors to stabilize. It is recommended that programs strongly consider providing extended shelter stays for most or all shelter residents. This practice may result in a lack of beds for new callers, and programs can look at other options to meet the need. Programs can determine if alternative sheltering or increasing bed capacity is feasible.
- » **Financial Assistance:** Many community-based social service organizations shift their financial assistance funding to disaster projects. This practice can leave survivors who typically depend on that resource without assistance. Programs can consider shifting their own funding to provide a flexible funding program to survivors that can assist with their housing related or recovery needs. In addition, programs may consider assisting survivors with identifying, applying for, and obtaining D-SNAP (Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits, FEMA assistance, or other disaster recovery resources. The process for applying for D-SNAP benefits varies among the states, territories, and tribes.

Interested people can learn more about how to assist people in applying for FEMA assistance through various online trainings through FEMA's Emergency Management Institute:

<https://training.fema.gov/is/curriculum.aspx> (EMI Curriculum, n.d.)

Administrative Continuity

- » **IT Infrastructure:** Consider implementing cloud-based payroll, financial, and survivor records systems to avoid loss of data during disasters.
- » **Payroll and Budgeting:** Establish a plan to ensure payroll can continue and bills are paid during disaster and recovery efforts. Consider what will happen if you are not able to get to the physical office for an extended period of time. It is important to have a contingency plan that will outline how you will ensure the financial responsibilities are met. Here are some common issues faced after a disaster:
 - A disruption in state reimbursements. In some states, all state employees are shifted to disaster work, which slows down funding reimbursements. This can result in a cash flow shortage.
 - Access to bank accounts is limited or inaccessible. You may not have access to online banking systems. You may want to consider speaking with your bank about their plans to ensure you have access to your accounts during and after a disaster.
 - The needs of your organization can shift considerably. The needs presented after a disaster may not be aligned with your budget. Access to unrestricted funds can be vital. Assess each funding

source and its requirements around budget changes and project deliverables in response to changing needs.

- Regular payroll procedures are not available, and programs are not able to find an alternative method that meets the payroll schedule. This creates a huge burden for program staff who need timely access to their pay.
- » **Communicating with the Public:** Update your organization's website and social media regularly to inform the community about your operational status during the disaster. Programs should be sure to include information that lets survivors know what services are currently available.
- **Media:** Media requests may increase. It can be helpful to appoint a media contact that will handle press inquiries.
- **Donations:** Donations may also increase.
 - ♦ When a disaster occurs, community-wide campaigns are common. It can be important for programs to understand who is receiving these overall community donations and if you are able to access the donations. These can be monetary donations or items.
 - ♦ You may want to consider organizing your own donation campaign or setting up donation collections throughout your service area. Don't overlook the rural communities you serve.
 - ♦ Many advocacy programs see an increase in direct donations after a disaster. Since there is considerable work that goes into managing donations, programs should consider options for the management of this influx. Coalitions or other sibling programs can help by managing the donations for the affected program.

Community Devastation

When an entire community is devastated by disaster, advocacy work for survivors may include being out in the community to assist with general rebuilding and recovery efforts. In these situations, safety for survivors is community rebuilding.

Special Considerations for Different Types of Disasters

- » **Fires:** Ensure staff are trained in fire evacuation procedures. Consider partnerships for temporary relocation during individual program disasters.
- » **Floods:** Understand your flood zone status and have appropriate insurance. Plan for the possibility of evacuation due to rising water levels.
- » **Hurricanes and Tornadoes:** Reinforce buildings and ensure storm shutters are in place. Plan for the evacuation of survivors if high winds or storm surges threaten safety.
- » **Public Health Disasters:** Adapt protocols for pandemics, including isolation procedures, PPE, and remote service delivery.

SPECIFIC RESPONSES FOR STATE AND TERRITORY DV COALITIONS

The first step in your Coalition's disaster preparedness plan is to gather information from stakeholders about the needs in your state or territory and what role(s) the Coalition can play that will be the most helpful. At a minimum, consult with your member programs and your State Administrator to assist with the prioritization of Coalition efforts. Coalitions can talk to member programs about what work they would like the coalition to do. They can provide information on past disasters, what they needed, and brainstorm ways that the coalition could fill those unmet needs.

Once the Coalition has determined their role, member programs can be notified of the ways the coalition can support them through the disaster preparedness and response process. The following pages provide some preparedness options to consider.

Create Policy Tools and Guidance for Stakeholders

Create sample disaster response policies or procedures that are specific to your state. Make them available to your member programs for modification and adoption.

Consult with an insurance agent to create guidance that includes recommended disaster related insurance coverage based on your state's needs.

Create a guidance document for funder requirements and expectations of grantees during a disaster. Some funders require notifications of evacuations, facility damage, or changes in staff composition. It can be helpful to have a simple reference guide that includes the requirements for all common funding streams in your state.

Disaster Planning with Tribes

Disasters, whether natural or human-caused, disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, including survivors of domestic violence. For Tribal Domestic Violence (DV) Programs, the challenges are compounded by unique jurisdictional complexities, often remote locations, historical trauma, and specific cultural considerations.

Unique Challenges for Tribal DV Programs in Disaster

When you have a safe physical location and the staff members needed to maintain basic shelter operations, you can begin the process of reuniting with evacuated survivors using the same methods utilized during evacuation.

Tribal communities and their DV programs face distinct challenges that must be addressed in disaster planning:

- 1. Sovereignty and Jurisdiction:** Navigating multiple governmental jurisdictions (tribal, state, federal) can complicate resource allocation, communication, and coordination during emergencies.
- 2. Geographic Isolation:** Many tribal lands are remote, making access to external resources, emergency services, and transportation difficult during and after a disaster.
- 3. Limited Resources:** Tribal DV programs often operate with fewer financial, human, and material resources compared to their non-tribal counterparts.
- 4. Cultural and Historical Trauma:** Disasters can re-trigger historical trauma, and culturally inappropriate response efforts can exacerbate distress. Planning must be trauma-informed and culturally sensitive.
- 5. Infrastructure Vulnerabilities:** Limited or fragile infrastructure (e.g., communication networks, roads, utilities) can quickly fail in a disaster, isolating communities.

6. **Confidentiality and Safety:** Maintaining confidentiality for survivors and ensuring their safety can be particularly challenging in small, interconnected communities, especially during displacement.
7. **Language Barriers:** For communities where traditional languages are spoken, emergency communications must be accessible and culturally appropriate.

Partnerships and Collaboration

- » **Tribal Government and Agencies:** Collaborate closely with tribal emergency management, law enforcement, health services, and other relevant tribal departments. Note that some tribes may not have formal emergency management services, but there may be a tribal member who volunteers to attend meetings and gather information.
- » **Local, State, and Federal Agencies:** Establish relationships with non-tribal emergency management, FEMA, state administrators and other relevant state and federal agencies to ensure tribal needs are recognized and met.
- » **Community Organizations:** Partner with other local nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and community groups to leverage resources and support.

Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate and Trauma-Informed Care

- » **Culturally Appropriate:** Ensure all planning and response efforts respect tribal customs, traditions, and spiritual practices. Involve elders and cultural leaders in the planning process.
- » **Trauma-Informed Approach:** Recognize the impact of historical and intergenerational trauma. Design services that prioritize safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness.
- » **Language Access:** Provide information and services in culturally relevant languages.

When developing a state disaster plan, it is crucial to incorporate tribal coalitions. It's important to note that certain tribal coalitions operate across multiple states. For instance, the Native Women's Society of the Great Plains serves a broad region encompassing southern Minnesota, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, northern Nebraska, and Iowa. A comprehensive list of tribal coalitions is available at:

<https://www.atcev.org/tribal-coalitions/> (Tribal Domestic Violence, n.d.).

Agency Communication Plans

Consider creating your own communication plan for the Coalition staff. In addition, the coalition may want to offer to be an additional resource for their member programs' communication plans. Some ways a coalition may be helpful are:

- » The coalition can secure copies of member program's contact lists. This can be helpful if the program is not able to access their contact lists or if the program would like the coalition to play a role in

contacting their program's staff. In this scenario, the coalition can take one task off of the recovering program's to do list.

- » The coalition can become a part of a member program's communication plan as a point of contact. For example, a program may include a step that will instruct their staff to call the coalition office if the agency communication lines are down. In this scenario the coalition can:
 - Relay information for program's leadership to staff who call in
 - Provide additional information to agency staff regarding general disaster updates
 - Collect updated contact information or status updates from program staff
 - Relay updates to program leadership once communication is restored

Liaison Between Stakeholders

Member Programs and Funders

After a disaster, the coalition can become a conduit of information between member programs and funders. Some ways coalitions can be helpful are:

- » Relay information about each program's status to funders.
- » Assist member programs with the completion of paperwork, applications, etc.
- » Relay any funder required notifications to programs.
- » Relay other funder requirements/expectations to the programs.
- » Assist programs with understanding the eligible expenses for each grant and the budget revision processes when the needs that are present are different than the needs that were budgeted.
- » Advocate for programs with funders, including:
 - Quantifying and reporting member program's needs.
 - Advocating with funders to ease the administrative burden on member programs affected by the disaster such as allowing more flexibility with the administrative processes, extending deadlines, and streamlining processes to quickly provide funding to affected programs.
 - Providing information on what advocacy work looks like after a disaster, how it may be different than before, and why disaster recovery work is directly related to survivor services and safety.
 - Advocating for programs with severe damage, particularly when services are impacted. The need for funding to stay intact is essential to recovery.

Coalitions can also begin these discussions before a disaster occurs. In disaster-prone areas, coalitions may want to begin discussing disaster response in ongoing coalition/funder partnership meetings.

Member Program Coordination

In many disasters, local DVSA programs assist each other in several ways. Two of the most common ways are answering the crisis line of an affected program or accepting survivors from programs that need to evacuate. Some programs may have Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or cooperative agreements that outline formal partnerships or programs may have informal agreements with each other. Member programs may request that the coalition assist with pre-planning coordination. When this is the case, it can be helpful for coalitions to start by identifying which individualized agreements are already in place, to understand the terms of each, and to know if they are formal or informal. This information can help guide the Coalition in creating an overall state, territory, or tribal response.

When agreements are not in place, coalitions can connect programs to each other to encourage partnerships for support. Here are a few pre-disaster options:

- » Helping to create a state plan for evacuation and/or crisis call routing based on areas of the state likely to be affected.
- » Matching programs to another program for evacuating so not everyone is trying to go to the same place when a disaster is imminent.

In instances when a disaster is imminent, the coalition may be providing assistance in a more urgent manner.

- » Coalitions can assist programs with coordinating evacuation and crisis line operations. This can include making phone calls to understand different shelters' capacity and coordinate other needed responses.
- » Consider the use of online platforms that coordinate shelter referrals in real time. As an example, Safe Shelter Collaborative is an online platform where shelters can send/receive shelter requests in real time with other providers.

<https://www.safesheltercollaborative.org/>

Some programs in your state may want to coordinate with a program across state lines. For example, a program that is located 10 miles from your state's border may be one hour from a program in a neighboring state, but four hours from the closest program within your state. If this is the case for your state, your coalition can consider collaborating with the other state's coalition to plan a more streamlined process for assistance.

Monitoring Conditions and Notifying Programs

Coalitions can monitor the weather conditions for the state and contact programs in areas predicted to be affected to ensure they are aware of the conditions and to offer assistance such as checking on plan enactment, offering support, and checking on any immediate needs.

Policy Work

Coalitions can consider if changes are needed to state laws or state agencies' policies and procedures to keep survivors safe during a disaster and strengthen their ability to recover after a disaster. For example, in Louisiana, when a survivor files a temporary order of protection, a hearing is set within two weeks to determine if a more permanent order will be granted. The temporary order expires on the date of the hearing. When Hurricane Katrina hit, the courthouses in New Orleans were not operational for an extended period of time. Every temporary order granted prior to Katrina expired with no ability for survivors to extend it. This left many survivors vulnerable and without protection. Shortly after, advocates successfully campaigned for a law that extends a temporary restraining order when a state of emergency is declared. The law states, "In the event that the hearing on the rule for the protective order is continued by the court because of a declared state of emergency made in accordance with R.S. 29:724, any temporary restraining order issued in the matter shall remain in force for five days after the date of conclusion of the state of emergency."

Now survivors in Louisiana have the protection they need when disasters strike. Your state may have different needs; however, it is important to think through ways in which survivors may be vulnerable when access to systems is limited or non-existent and how revisions to law may assist with closing those gaps.

Providing Information on Current State Laws

It is important that DVSA service providers are familiar with state, territory, or tribal laws about disasters and DVSA. The coalition can consider compiling information regarding laws in your state and distributing that to member programs. This can be particularly important to understand so that your member programs have all of the information needed to assist survivors fully.

Create Connections with State-Level Disaster or Emergency Management Organizations

Using the guidance provided in the previous section [Create Connections with Disaster or Emergency Management Organizations on page 10](#), the Coalition can form state-level partnerships with governmental agencies and non-profit organizations whose primary mission is disaster response and recovery.

Partnerships for Supplies

Coalitions may consider coordinating partnerships which will get programs needed supplies. Here are examples of partnerships other coalitions have fostered:

- » The coalition in Puerto Rico has created a partnership with the government to ensure shelters have access to the gasoline needed to run generators when the electricity is out. This is critical to programs there because when disaster strikes, gasoline supplies are low, and it can be difficult to access.

- » The coalition in Florida was able to advocate for generators and received 13 of them to distribute to programs across the state.
- » The coalition in Texas contacted state legislators and community partners to ensure shelters had access to water when the water supply was affected by a storm.

Training Opportunities for Disaster Response Agencies

The coalition can consider providing training to FEMA, Red Cross and other disaster-response entities. These are the entities usually in charge of government-led evacuation shelters and coalitions can provide valuable information to shelter operations staff about:

- » Identifying domestic violence and sexual assault
- » Preparing for the unique needs of survivors in evacuation shelters
- » Trauma-informed practices
- » Ways they can prevent abuse and assault in shelters
- » Ways to respond to abuse and assault in shelters
- » Ways to collaborate with DVSA response programs

Creating a Disaster Funding Campaign

Oftentimes, when disaster strikes, people across the world want to help. Coalitions can help put the infrastructure in place to manage disaster donations in preparation for future disasters, allowing your coalition to quickly mobilize when needed. A disaster fund can give your member programs access to unrestricted funds that are critical in the aftermath of a disaster. When creating a disaster funding campaign, coalitions should consider the following:

- » The events that qualify as a disaster or emergency for the purpose of the fund
- » How the donated money will be tracked in their accounting system
- » The process for determining how funds are distributed
- » The process for member programs to request assistance through the fund
- » Guidelines for administrative costs for both the Coalition to administer the fund and the recipient's use of funds for administrative costs, if both apply
- » The person responsible for approving requests
- » Appeal rights for programs that are denied assistance
- » The methods that will be used to advertise the fund to potential donors

Assist Programs with External-Facing Responses

The aftermath of a disaster is overwhelming. One way that Coalitions can assist programs is to manage some of the outward facing responses while programs focus on re-establishing services. Some examples are:

» **Managing In-Kind Donations:** Can the coalition receive, sort, and deliver donations to take that burden off of local programs? One coalition spoke of a past experience in which they distributed donations. They had a large number of items left over and they brought those to a resale store. The coalition was then able to give the member programs the money they received from the resale store.

The coalition may also consider setting up donation boxes to collect donations for programs. If you decide to do this, remember to include rural areas that are sometimes overlooked as potential donation locations.

The coalition may also research and collect information about overall donations coming into the community. Coalitions can contact organizations or groups that are temporarily collecting donations for the larger community to understand eligibility requirements and the processes for accessing these donations. They can then provide that crucial information to member programs that are eligible.

» **Media Interviews:** Coalitions can give programs the option of sending all media calls to them. In this instance, the coalition can conduct interviews on behalf of the member program.

- Create press releases and distribute them to member programs for their use.
- Create a social media campaign or sample posts. These can be posted by your coalition and shared by your member programs.

Visit Affected Member Programs

When possible, coalition staff should go to affected member programs to visit. At a minimum, this will provide an opportunity for support and encouragement. It may also provide an opportunity for an additional assessment. One person spoke of a member program that reported a “small amount of damage” to their facility. When they arrived at the facility, the front portion of the building had walls that were no longer there. Because so many people in the community had experienced total devastation, to the program, only having a portion of their building damaged felt like a small amount of damage. Programs will likely report on damage relative to the overall community impact. Coalition staff, with the program’s permission, can take additional photos or videos of the damage to share with funders. In some states, state administrators may want to join the coalition in these visits.

Provide Updated Information about Available Resources to Member Programs

After a disaster, members of a community may have access to additional resources. These can be vital for survivors being served by member programs. The Coalition can maintain a list of resources available with information on how to access them for affected programs. Resources available can include disaster SNAP benefits, FEMA resources, and more.

The Coalition may also consider sharing information directly to the public through their website and social media accounts. Information shared can be safety tips for survivors during a disaster, resources for evacuation and recovery, and information on accessing domestic violence services during and after the disaster if their local program is not fully operational.

Convening Disaster Response Teams

Consider training and prepping a small number of DV program staff from different areas in the state who can be communication coordinators for programs that are affected. This team could work as a rapid response team of experts in DVSA program management to assist with staffing, damage assessment, and general response in the aftermath of a disaster. Ideally, representatives would be available from multiple regions and have knowledge about a variety of disasters. While this idea is new, and has not been developed, one idea for implementation is to create a system to temporarily “loan” a staff member from sister coalitions or local programs to act as a community liaison during the aftermath of a disaster.

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 - b. Risk assessment
 - c. Plan review dates and updates
- 2. Communication Protocols**
 - a. Emergency contact lists
 - b. Crisis communication plan
 - c. Survivor communication plan
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 - a. Evacuation procedures
 - b. Facility safety protocols
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- 4. Staff Roles and Responsibilities**
 - a. Staff disaster roles
 - b. Training materials
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- 5. Survivor Support**
 - a. Evacuation support
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- 6. Partnerships and Collaboration**
 - a. Partner agreements
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- 7. Financial Documentation and Compliance**
 - a. Emergency fund protocol
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- 8. Supplies & Inventory**
 - a. Emergency supply list
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- 9. Post-Disaster Recovery**
 - a. Damage assessment
 - b. Emotional support for staff and clients
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 - a. Plan distribution and storage
 - b. Accessible location

APPENDIX B**Sample Personnel Policy for Emergency Days**

At the discretion of the Executive Director, [Agency Name] may provide up to five paid emergency days per year to agency employees. Emergency days may be declared in the event of inclement weather, fire, flood, pandemic, or some other "Act of God." Additional days can be added at the discretion of the Board of Directors.

In determining emergency days, the Executive Director will consider recommendations of emergency officials, school and government office closures, potential or actual loss of utilities, and employee travel conditions.

When an emergency day has been declared, the Executive Director, or their designee, will notify all agency staff members.

APPENDIX C

Sample Communication Plan

Communication before, during, and after a disaster is critical. This plan outlines the communication expectations for both agency leadership and agency staff members.

[Agency Name] will keep a compiled list of all agency staff members with information about communication contacts. This list will include:

- » Employee's phone number(s)
- » An email address
- » Emergency contact information, including phone and email

This list will be updated twice a year by the [person responsible] and will be stored in [place stored].

Prior to a Disaster

When a disaster is imminent [person responsible] will hold the responsibility of ensuring the communication list is accessible to agency leadership.

The Executive Director is the person authorized to make official decisions about [agency name]'s response to a disaster. Agency staff can expect to receive communication regarding these responses shortly after decisions are made. Communication will sometimes come directly from the Executive Director, and sometimes through the staff member's immediate supervisor, depending on the circumstances of the disaster.

Agency staff can expect to receive this communication through the contact information they provided for the agency's communication list or through their official work email account.

Agency staff members who need additional time off or other accommodations due to the disaster should speak with their direct supervisor.

After a Disaster

In most cases, agency staff are expected to communicate with leadership or their supervisor regarding their availability to report back to work after emergency days conclude.

In the instance that the disaster creates circumstances that have a significant impact on the agency's community, this may not be possible. When this happens, agency staff members should communicate their situation to their immediate supervisor within 48 hours of the end of the disaster event. As not all communication methods will be available after a disaster, staff members should attempt to communicate using any of the following methods as they are available:

- » Phone (call or text)
- » Email

- » Agency's communication apps (Teams or other communications app)
- » Private message the agency's social media accounts
- » Contact the state coalition's office to provide information on your situation to be relayed to [agency name]

In turn, the agency will use the following to communicate with staff members:

- » Phone (call or text)
- » Email
- » Agency's communication apps (Teams)
- » Providing information to the state coalition's office to be relayed to agency staff members who call them
- » Posting information on social media
- » Contacting staff member's emergency contact when no contact has been made for (4) days

APPENDIX D**List of Emergency Supplies to Consider****Essential supplies**

- a. Non-perishable food – canned fruits, peanut butter, ready-to-eat canned meats, soups, etc. (at least a three-day supply)
- b. Hand can openers
- c. Water (at least a three-day supply – one gallon of water per person, per day)
- d. Solar-powered flashlights and/or regular flashlights (with extra batteries)
- e. Radios (with appropriate batteries, if relevant)
- f. First aid kits
- g. Hand sanitizer, Clorox wipes, baby wipes
- h. Face masks, other PPE
- i. Duct tape, zip ties, rope, trash bags big enough to cover equipment
- j. Basic tools (hammer, screwdriver, pliers)
- k. Ice chest
- l. Paper plates, cups, plastic utensils
- m. Small solar panels that can charge electronics

Supplies to assist with evacuation of survivors

- a. Duffle bags/backpacks (government evacuations don't always allow suitcases)
- b. Blankets/pillows
- c. Go bags (bags that include a pillow, blanket, hygiene items, medications, important papers, flashlight, etc. that you can distribute to survivors going to an evacuation shelter)

Other supplies that can be helpful

- a. A portable generator to power essentials with the gas needed to run it
- b. Gas stoves or burners
- c. Air mattress(es) for staff who may need to sleep at shelter during an emergency
- d. Whistles to be given to survivors to use if they need to alert staff that they need help when traditional communication methods are not working
- e. Water purification supplies like tablets or straws
- f. Walkie talkies for staff on site to communicate with each other when phones are out. If you decide to purchase and use walkie talkies, please consider any potential confidentiality issues that may arise and how you will mitigate those.
- g. Satellite communication devices such as the Garmin In Reach Mini (may have monthly subscription fees)
- h. Roaming satellite internet equipment such as Starlink (may have monthly subscription fees)

APPENDIX E**Roadmap to Creating Connections with Disaster or Emergency Management Organizations**

Becoming a part of your community's overall response to disaster can be beneficial to your agency and the survivors you serve. There are opportunities at the state level and community levels to become involved. While anyone can be involved in whichever capacity that works for them, for most communities, it makes sense for the state/territorial Coalition to engage on a statewide level while local programs engage with their community initiatives.

STEP 1:**Start with your existing networks**

- » Are there people that you have relationships with now who participate in response efforts? Sometimes other non-profits such as Catholic Charities, local United Way chapters, or nonprofit Community Action Agencies that you may interact with regularly are already connected to local disaster groups.
- » On the state level - are your state administrators involved in response efforts? What about other government agencies that you have working relationships with?
- » On the community level – do you currently have relationships with anyone in your local government? This can be a good place to start.

You can speak with your existing networks to let them know you are developing an expanded disaster plan and would like to become more involved in your state (or community)'s overall disaster response.

STEP 2:**Use internet searches to find out if your community has existing disaster response initiatives. You can start by searching for contact information from the following groups.**

- » Red Cross
- » VOAD
- » FEMA CERT

Once you find local contact information, send an email, or make a call to express your interest and ask about upcoming meetings or initiatives.

STEP 3:**Attend networking events**

- » As you attend meetings and events in your community, ask others that you interact with about the disaster response initiatives in your community. You may find people who can link you with the appropriate contact information to become involved.

STEP 4:**Research your local government structures**

- » Emergency management departments live in different places within government organizations. In some areas, governmental websites list the different initiatives of each department, and you can find contact information there. For others, particularly in smaller or more rural communities, contact with a local representative's office may be the only way to find out more.

Once you have found the appropriate contact information, reach out to introduce yourself and express your interest in participating. Here are some tips to assist with relationship building once contact is made:

- » Attend meetings – be on time and stay for the entire meeting when possible
- » Engage while being genuine and authentic
- » Listen actively with a learner's mind
- » Volunteer to assist when possible and appropriate

When you attend a disaster response meeting for the first time, the information presented may feel overwhelming. While it is always appropriate to ask questions, it is equally important to be cognizant of the amount of time and space we are taking. You may need to write your questions down and after the meeting, ask the chairperson to schedule a one-on-one meeting with you at a later date. This will give you the opportunity to ask extensive questions in an appropriate setting.

APPENDIX F

Cooperative Agreement

This Agreement is made and entered into by and between **[Program A Name]** and **[Program B Name]** (hereinafter referred to as “the Programs”) for the purpose of ensuring clear communication, privacy, confidentiality, and efficient information-sharing during changes in program operations or the evacuation of survivors in times of disaster or emergency.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this agreement is to outline the procedures between Programs that will be used during a disaster to ensure that all actions and communications comply with state and federal confidentiality laws and regulations. This includes clear guidance on what releases are required from survivors and how information is to be shared between the Programs to facilitate service provision and evacuation efforts while protecting survivors’ rights.

Services to be Provided

Each Program agrees to provide mutual support in times of need by answering each other’s crisis lines and offering evacuation options as needed. Specifically, each Program commits to:

- » **Crisis Line Support:** Answering the crisis line for the other Program during periods of emergency or disaster, ensuring continuous support for survivors.
- » **Evacuation Options:** Providing shelter beds as an evacuation option to the other Program when requested to assist in the safe evacuation of survivors.

Both Programs acknowledge the importance of collaboration during times of crisis to ensure the safety and well-being of survivors.

[Consider including information about the roles of each agency in advocacy service provision.]

Evacuation Procedures

The Programs agree to collaborate on the following evacuation steps:

- » **Coordinating Logistics:** Programs will coordinate transportation, shelter availability, and resources to ensure that survivors can be safely evacuated.
- » **Information on Shelter Conditions:** Home program staff will provide survivors with a general overview of the host shelter, including the shelter’s setup, available services, and any differences that may affect their comfort or needs.
- » **Survivor Preferences:** Programs will make efforts to honor survivors’ preferences.
- » **Pets:** Both Programs agree to consider the evacuation and care of pets as part of their disaster response. In the event of an evacuation, each Program will make reasonable efforts to accommodate pets, ensuring that survivors can stay with their animals during the evacuation process.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Both Programs agree to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of survivor information at all times. The following guidelines will be followed:

- » Survivor information will only be shared as necessary for evacuation or safety purposes and with the expressed written consent of each survivor.
- » Any information shared will be done in compliance with the Violence Against Women Act's Confidentiality provisions, along with all other federal and state laws regarding confidentiality requirements.
- » Programs will ensure that all staff members involved in evacuation are trained in confidentiality procedures and the importance of safeguarding survivor information.

Information Sharing and Communication

The Programs agree to the following procedures for the sharing of information and communication during an evacuation:

- » **Information Sharing:** Survivor information may only be shared with the other program with explicit consent from the survivor.
- » **Communication Protocols:**
 - ◆ Both Programs will establish a clear communication chain that includes primary contacts for each organization.
 - ◆ Programs will share the necessary information, including but not limited to survivor needs, evacuation status, and available resources.
- » [Add in specific, agreed-upon information to be shared, consider including how advocates at home program can/will communicate with survivors while they are at the host program]

Releases and Consent

The Programs agree to ensure that appropriate consent is obtained from survivors before sharing their information. The following steps will be taken:

- » **Informed Consent:** Prior to evacuating, survivors will be informed of how their information may be shared between the Programs.
- » **Release Forms:** A signed release form will be obtained from survivors to authorize the sharing of their personal information with the host shelter or any other programs involved in the evacuation.

Payment/Exchange of Goods

Both Programs agree to support each other in times of disaster by facilitating the payment or exchange of goods and services as needed to ensure the effective evacuation and care of survivors. This may include, but is not limited to:

- » **Payment for Services or Supplies:** Each Program will provide payment for goods or services that are required for the evacuation process, including transportation, shelter accommodations, food, hygiene supplies, or any other necessary resources.
- » **Reimbursement:** Any payments made by one Program on behalf of the other will be reimbursed promptly, based on mutually agreed-upon terms and amounts, and in accordance with any applicable policies or funding requirements.

Both Programs acknowledge the importance of transparent communication regarding costs, payments, and the exchange of goods to ensure the smooth coordination of services during a disaster response.

Review and Amendments

This Agreement will be reviewed annually to ensure that it reflects any changes in legal requirements, best practices, or program procedures. Both Programs agree to amend this Agreement as needed to improve the evacuation process and comply with privacy and confidentiality regulations.

Signatures

By signing below, the authorized representatives of **[Program A Name]** and **[Program B Name]** agree to the terms outlined in this Agreement.

[Program A Representative Name]

Title:

Date:

Signature:

[Program B Representative Name]

Title:

Date:

Signature:

APPENDIX G**Checklist for Moving Survivors During Evacuation****Communicating with Shelter Residents**

- » **Inform Survivors:** Communicate with survivors about the evacuation plan, timing, and destination shelter.
- » **Address Questions and Concerns:** Provide clarity on the shelter's accommodations, setup, guidelines, and resources available.
- » **Ensure Confidentiality:** Discuss privacy and confidentiality protocols with survivors during the evacuation process.
- » **Service Provision and Communication:** Discuss with survivors what they can expect from you regarding services and communication during their time at the host program.

Packing and Preparation

- » **Pack Essential Items:** Help survivors gather necessary personal items (medications, identification, important documents, hygiene products, etc.).
- » **Ensure Pet Care:** If applicable, confirm arrangements for evacuating pets, including transportation and shelter accommodations.
- » **Prepare Evacuation Kits, if needed:** Gather and pack emergency kits (food, water, first aid supplies, blankets, etc.) for transport.

Coordination and Logistics

- » **Designate Roles:** Assign specific staff members to roles, such as transportation coordination, documentation, and security during the evacuation.
- » **Ensure Safe Transportation:** Confirm that all transportation vehicles are prepared for safe travel (clean, sufficient capacity, emergency supplies).
- » **Prepare for Communication:** Set up communication systems (cell phones, two-way radios) to stay in touch during transit.

Evacuation Execution

- » **Conduct a Headcount:** Ensure all survivors are accounted for and their special needs are noted before departure.
- » **Complete a Spreadsheet or Form:** Ensure that you know each survivor who is evacuating, and where they are going.
- » **Secure Personal Items:** Ensure that survivors' belongings are safely loaded into vehicles.

- » **Monitor for Special Needs:** Make sure that survivors with medical, mobility, or mental health needs are provided with appropriate support during the move.
- » **Transport Survivors:** Follow the designated evacuation route and keep survivors informed of the progress.

Arrival at the New Shelter

- » **Notify Receiving Shelter of Arrival:** Contact the receiving shelter to confirm the arrival of the evacuees.
- » **Conduct a Headcount:** Perform a second headcount to ensure no survivors are left behind.
- » **Distribute Shelter Assignments:** Direct survivors to their designated spaces in the new shelter.
- » **Provide Initial Support:** Offer food, water, and emotional support to survivors upon arrival.

Post-Evacuation Actions

- » **Debriefing:** Hold a debriefing session with staff to review the evacuation process and address any issues, if time allows.
- » **Document the Evacuation:** Record details of the evacuation, including any challenges, survivor needs, and resources provided.
- » **Follow-Up with Survivors:** Ensure survivors are settled and address any ongoing needs (medical, psychological support, etc.).
- » **Provide a Timeline for Shelter Return:** Post-disaster, inform survivors when they can expect to be picked up and answer any questions they may have about the process.

APPENDIX H**Advocate Conversation Guide**

This guide serves as general guidance for advocates when discussing disaster-related concerns with survivors.

Tips for Approaching the Conversation in a Trauma-Informed Manner**» Timing is Crucial**

- ◆ Avoid discussing evacuation plans immediately upon entry to the shelter, unless a disaster is imminent.
- ◆ Aim to have the conversation a couple of days after their arrival, once they've had time to acclimate and feel more stable.

» Create a Safe Environment

- ◆ Conduct the discussion in private.
- ◆ Use open, compassionate body language and a calm tone of voice.

» Apply Trauma-Informed Principles

- ◆ Recognize potential triggers and avoid language or scenarios that may exacerbate stress.
- ◆ Validate the survivor's feelings and experiences, acknowledging their resilience in seeking safety.

» Empower Autonomy

- ◆ Present options as choices, allowing the survivor to decide what feels safest and most appropriate for their situation.
- ◆ Avoid pressuring them into decisions, and provide ample time to process information, if possible.]

Key Discussion Points

- » Clearly explain the program's evacuation plan and decision-making process.
- » Options for evacuation:
 - ◆ Discuss transportation and shelter options available to survivors.
 - ◆ Provide information on agency support during evacuation, such as transport, temporary housing, and resource provision.
- » Evacuation tips:
 - ◆ Pack essentials for at least three days (clothes, medications, other personal items, and infant supplies such as formula, diapers, etc.).
 - ◆ Secure paper prescriptions for important medications from a doctor in advance.
 - ◆ Bring copies of orders of protection or other important documents.
 - ◆ Put important documents in Ziploc bags to protect from water damage.

- ◆ Utilize PPE and sanitation supplies to mitigate the risk of contracting illnesses when evacuating.
- ◆ Encourage survivors to pair up with another survivor that they are friends with in shelter for mutual support.
- ◆ Provide tags for children with the survivor's name and number. Discuss with the survivor if they also would like to include the program or coalition's number on the tag as well in case of separation.
- » Provide any important information about their belongings that will be left at shelter.
 - ◆ Timeframe for retaining items if no contact is made.
 - ◆ Encourage them to take any valuable items or secure them off site before evacuating.
 - ◆ Relay that the program cannot be responsible for damaged or stolen items, if relevant to your agency.
 - ◆ Discuss special considerations for vehicles left at shelter.
- » Discuss a communication plan
 - ◆ Explain how the program will communicate with survivors during and after the disaster.
 - ◆ Establish whether they want to be contacted, and if so how.
 - ◆ Ensure survivor safety by verifying safe methods of communication.
 - ◆ Review their emergency contact information and discuss when you would call their emergency contact. Make sure you have the survivor's permission to use this option. Survivors have the right to not give an emergency contact. They also have the right to refuse to give permission for you to contact their emergency contact.
- » Discuss what resources or help you can provide, such as financial aid, transportation, or connections to other community resources.
- » Discuss any survivor needs and listen to their concerns around the disaster.
- » Collaborate on a personalized safety plan for the evacuation, including children and pets.
- » Create a safe space for processing of emotions. Survivors are already overwhelmed, and this will take an emotional toll on survivors. Provide reassurance and validate their concerns.

APPENDIX I**Information Form****Survivor Information**

Name	
Age	
Sex	
Race	
Ethnicity	
Relation to Abuser	

Children's Information

Name	Age	Sex	Race	Ethnicity	Relation to Abuser

Accommodations Needed

- ☐ Accessibility Needs
- ☐ Pet Accommodations
- ☐ Medical Support
- ☐ Language Assistance (Specify Language): _____
- ☐ Special Diet (Specify Needs): _____
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____



Emergency Contact Information

Name	Relation to Survivor	Phone Number	Other Contact Info	Permission to Contact

Notes or Additional Information



This document and other resources can be found in the National Network to End Domestic Violence's Private Resource Library at nnedv.coalitionmanager.org.

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