

**Nine Disaster Response and Preparedness Points Offered by
NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, Linda I. Gibbs
During Key Note Address at HSC's Forum**
[Sandy: One Year Later: Assessing Community Recovery and Anticipating
Another Disaster](#)

1. Identify a Leading Agency in Each Neighborhood

Identify a leading nonprofit agency for every neighborhood and define neighborhoods broadly (example, Coney Island, Rockaways, Lower East Side). Ideally the lead nonprofit is identified in advance of a disaster with community buy-in and would have the flexibility in staff capacity and resources to play this critical lead coordinating role. That lead organization must be ready and willing to commit a full time resource to offering coordination at the community level. While the lead organization must be known to and working in the community, it would be useful to have operations in communities outside of the impacted area so that outside resources and staff from areas unaffected can be draw upon.

2. Identify Nonprofits Operating in Neighborhoods Along with Their Expertise

Knowing which organizations are in the neighborhood in advance of a disaster, including their location, expertise, and capacity can ensure all resources and efforts are maximized. These organizations should be ready to act as part of a coordinated network response. Some may in fact be victims of the emergency conditions and getting their offices and staff back on their feet so they can help others will be a critical part of the work. The local information will also make it clear during a disaster what each organization can and cannot bring to the table. An advanced understanding of which staff can quickly be redeployed to engage in recovery work post-disaster would also be very useful.

3. Be a Resource to Others if You're Not in the Lead

Organizations outside the impacted neighborhood should offer their assistance, but avoid coming in and taking actions without consulting with the lead agency. Asking what is needed and understanding the action plan will help ensure the work of outside groups is maximized, fills gaps best, and not duplicative.

4. Coordinate With the City

The urge to "do something" and be helpful is significant after a disaster, but can also lead to unhelpful actions and overwhelm systems that need to have laser focus during response efforts. All efforts to help should be in synch with local government actions and should be focused on filling gaps. Clarity on which nonprofit activities are voluntary and will not be reimbursed by government is also important. Nonprofits should recognize that government has a greater ability to fund long term recovery efforts over immediate response. Many urgently needed activities in the immediate moments of and after a disaster may draw on the greatest strength to be offered from the sector as a voluntary response.

5. Be Part of One Team

Disasters are not the time for organizational self-promotion. The efforts of all groups matter and insistence on having a particular agency logo prominent on relief worker T-shirts or elsewhere distracts from the recovery efforts. There will be plenty of time post-disaster for the various groups to talk about their contributions and take credit for their role. It is critical that all groups involved in the recovery act as a coordinated team and put branding aside. The only branding needed at this time is that which is designated to provide the greatest clarity to victims of the disaster.

6. Be There Before During and After

Many nonprofits are active immediately after a disaster and continue to meet needs in the long term, but short and long term recovery and response efforts would be vastly improved with pre-disaster work. When a natural disaster is expected groups working in those communities should work to reduce the impact, particularly on vulnerable populations like seniors, disabled, and kids by reaching out in advance to ensure they are evacuating if necessary and / or have a relief plan. Doing advanced outreach can reduce chaos post-disaster. Pre-contact and planning can ensure vulnerable individuals are secure. More nonprofits should leverage their community networks and make sure a plan is in place for populations with complexities.

7. Develop Mapping Technology Using Existing Data

Using existing data sources about who is living in communities such as real estate maps and case management lists, a mapping system should be developed to help identify and track families and individuals impacted by a disaster so groups working in the neighborhoods can quickly identify those most in need (vulnerable individuals) and identify who needs what. This technology, potentially a shared smartphone app, could be used by all organizations working in the area to report needs and services delivered; vastly reducing duplication of efforts and identifying and filling gaps. Confidentiality issues would of course need to be considered.

8. Coordinate, Communicate, Collaborate

All organizations, including nonprofits, religious entities, community based organizations, and new voluntary run efforts must coordinate, communicate, and collaborate their work within a neighborhood. Confusion is created among residents seeking assistance when organizations move forward with their own approach without taking into consideration the efforts and actions of other entities also serving the community. This is the reason it is so important to identify a clear lead nonprofit agency for every neighborhood, and have as complete a roster of local non-profits included as possible.

9. Leverage Knowledge to Identify and Fill Need

We should leverage the information gained during disasters about community needs and resources to build resiliency. Emergencies shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of a region. We should use this knowledge to not only better prepare for future emergencies, but also to improve the everyday experience of those living in the neighborhood.