

How to Write An Agency Disaster Plan in Six Weeks

Write the answers to the following questions in a simple notebook. It should take only an hour or less to answer each week's list of items-that's just twelve minutes per day. Work on the questions with others to build the most complete plan possible.

Week One

Can Your Agency Continue to Serve After a Disaster?

- List the disasters that will interrupt the service you provide.
- What will happen to service?
- Realistically, how many staff will work after a disaster?
 - if it strikes during work?
 - if it occurs during a workweek, but before the day begins?
 - if it happens on a weekend?
- Of remaining staff, what skills will be available?
- What work can volunteers do?

Week Two

The Emergency Team

- Who will be on your emergency team?
- Incident command (who leads?)
- Operations (who does the work?)
- Logistics (who gets the resources?)
- Finance (who tracks all activity?)
- Information (who keeps everyone in the know?)
- Assign the people who are actually the most qualified to fill each role.
- What will be each team member's responsibilities?
- How will the team make decisions?

Week Three

What Resources are on Hand?

- How can power and water sources be checked and shut off if necessary?
- Will you need power? Where can you get a generator?
- Is there a phone that is not dependent on electricity? Where is the nearest pay phone? Are there coins or phone card in petty cash?
- Develop a source of water.
- Will you need food? Where can you get it?
- What data do you need to serve your clients? Are computers necessary?
- Are files backed up and stored off site? Regularly backup your files to paper.
- Take an inventory of transportation that will be accessible after a disaster. Is it enough? What can you do now?

Week Four

Your Neighborhood

- Where is the nearest public health clinic? Who is in charge? What is the phone number?
- Do the nearest police and fire stations know about you? Will they be able to respond in a major disaster?
- Where are potential sites for mass care? Look for central open spaces, a high school, someplace with showers and space.
- Are there neighboring agencies? Do you serve the same clientele? Can you share resources? How can neighboring businesses help the agency? Do the managers of supermarkets, pharmacies, and hardware stores know about you?

Week Five

Your Clients

- How many clients could be on in a disaster? Can they stay for three days?
- What will be needed? Where can you get sufficient quantities of food, water, medicine?
- How will you find out about clients who are off site?
- Who do you need to communicate with regarding clients? Off site staff? Families of clients? Are there others dependent on the information you hold about clients?
- How will you communicate? List the most critical contacts that need to be made.

Week Six

Collaboration

- If evacuated, what will your clients need that may not be available in a mass shelter?
- What services can you offer to mass care providers to ensure that your clients receive equal treatment?
- How will your core services be impacted by evacuation or the sharing of services with relief providers?
- What agencies can you join with to ensure the care of your clients? Are there potential partner agencies as prepared for a disaster as you?

With the answers to the above questions written in a notebook, you have a basic plan for your agency that will help you to continue service to your clients in the critical three days after a disaster.

Important Phone Numbers

The Sonoma County Chapter American Red Cross
(707) 577-7600

Sonoma County Dept of Emergency Services
(Disaster preparedness information)
(707) 565-1152

Volunteer Center of Sonoma County
(Volunteer resources)
(707) 573-3399

When creating an agency plan, keep in mind some basic assumptions:

- After a catastrophic disaster, you may be isolated from emergency relief for three days.
- Telephones will not work. A pay phone may operate sooner than a normal home or business phone. If phones do work, it will be easier to place a call to someone outside of the Bay Area rather than to a local number. Plan to work without a telephone.
- The Sonoma County Department of Emergency Services (OES) will be busy coordinating the operations of official responders such as police, fire, and paramedic services. The OES can answer coordinated requests for resources.
- The American Red Cross will provide help regardless of a victim's income, nationality, or physical ability.
- However, mass shelters and feeding sites are designed for the public at large. At the mass care site nearest to your clients, there may not be enough space or qualified help for people with special needs.
- Community-based organizations, whose daily mission is to help people with special needs, are the most qualified agencies to provide relief to vulnerable populations.
- The Dept of Emergency Services and the American Red Cross will rely on the ability of community-based organizations to survive a disaster and continue serving vulnerable residents.