



Partnering with Faith Organizations for Disaster Preparedness

Faith-based organizations, including houses of worship and service agencies, are important partners in disaster preparedness.

What are the communication strengths of faith-based organizations?

Faith-based organizations (FBO)s have many unique qualities that make them allies in communicating about disaster preparedness. Due to their status as trusted messengers, they are well-positioned to promote disaster preparedness and awareness messaging among their members. This is a particularly valuable strength when members of the congregation are from populations that are difficult to reach by other means. Oftentimes, FBOs share the culture and speak the language(s) of their members, enabling them to frame preparedness messages in a way that is the most meaningful for their members.



What are some of the service provision strengths of faith-based groups?

Faith based organizations may also be well equipped for service provision in the event of a disaster. Many houses of worship and service agencies already provide services that are essential to maintain during a disaster and will be able to respond to needs that would increase in a crisis. For example:

- Sikh gurdwaras (temples) provide food to all comers on a daily basis, meaning they have the facilities and the experience to supply a high volume of meals if needed during a disaster.
- Many religious organizations provide community services such as sheltering, outreach to homebound community members, or meals on wheels-style services.
- Counseling and supportive programs such as AA that are run by FBOs as well as pastoral counseling will need to continue during a disaster. These services may in fact have to serve an increased need due to the stress a disaster creates.
- FBOs have the infrastructure and the physical structures to support disaster preparedness initiatives. They also have the ability to quickly assess and advocate on behalf of their constituencies—many of whom for which they may be the primary or only source of community interaction.

How can I reach out to faith-based organizations?

Engaging faith-based organizations in community preparedness and planning is critical if you expect that they will be part of the response. Invite local FBOs to participate in the planning process, much as other community organizations are involved. Identify the types of activities they are already involved in that may be important in a disaster. The New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS) has partnered with the National Disasters Interfaith Network in providing a web-based resource for FBOs and their partners: <http://www.nydis.org/index2.html>.

What are some exemplary initiatives?

NYDIS is working with the city of New York's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to develop innovative ways to strengthen the disaster preparedness of underserved communities it serves. Some examples of current initiatives include:

- **The Emergency Operations Center (EOC):** NYDIS has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the OEM that defines NYDIS's role in relief and recovery efforts. In an emergency, the Mayor of New York activates the EOC as a crisis command center to facilitate inter-agency coordination. Key NYDIS personnel and board members are trained to staff NYDIS's EOC desk, which centralizes communication between faith communities and government agencies during a disaster.
- **HOW CALM™** is a password protected web-based database that tracks the logistics and resources of over 7,000 houses of worship, religious schools and faith-based human service institutions in NYC. NYDIS coordinates the use of specific types of data with NYC OEM for mitigation planning and emergency response. The data are used with geographic information systems to map vulnerabilities and to ensure rapid and accurate allocation of services during disasters.

Where can I find resources?

- **Alabama's Be Ready Sunday Campaign** has resources to download such as a modifiable bulletin that and a church disaster preparedness checklist: <http://www.servealabama.gov/New%20Folder/BeReadySunday.htm>
- **National Disaster Interfaith Network** provides resources and information about local and state interfaith organizations that focus on disaster preparedness training, relief, recovery, spiritual care and unmet needs: <http://www.n-din.org/>



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