

Responding to a Community in Crisis

A step-by-step guide to responding when an act of terror, a tragedy, or a man-made disaster occurs.

Act

When a crisis happens in your community, a number of decisions and phone calls will need to be made within the first day or two after an event. Remember that you are and will be needed, but that philanthropy's role is not that of a first responder.

- Gather members or partners for a conference call or in-person meeting as soon as possible. During this meeting, determine the response methods at your disposal and how they can be used. For example: posting information on your website, continued conference calls, and/or launching a fund.
- When launching a fund, determine how you will receive online donations, what your administrative fee will be, and how you will remain transparent on your intent and use of funds received. Please see the Playbook toolkit: Setting Up A Disaster Fund. Reach out to potential fund partners, such as the governor's office, other foundations, or community leaders.
- Contact your grantees and donors to determine their wishes and needs during this time.
- Communicate with your organization's board and its regular donors about the event and what your organization is doing to respond. Provide the rationale for your response
- It is likely that there will be a high volume of media inquiries. Decide who will be the spokesperson to the media and how often they will answer inquiries. For example, set aside an hour or two daily to read and answer emails or return phone calls from members of the press. Let them know that you will always get back to them, but that you are setting aside specific time each day to do so. Request that they clearly communicate their deadlines to you in their messages.

Engage

As you work through the immediate aftermath of a crisis, you will move into a new phase of actions, centered on transitioning the community into long-term recovery.

- Contact the attorney general's office. They can advise on the state's laws for fundraising, particularly if several individuals establish funds or fundraising events around a crisis.
- Consider for all circles of those impacted as you work with partners and begin making grants from your fund. Beyond the immediate victims and their families, there are witnesses, first responders, businesses, geographical community, extended communities (LGBTQ in Orlando, the running community following the Boston bombing), and others who are indirectly involved.

- Maintain crucial relationships with your local media outlets. They not only will help you share updates, but they can be good sources of information as you work to respond to the crisis.
- Pay attention to what conversations are happening during the crisis. Will any of them need to be extended and fostered to bring about change or healing after the brunt of the event passes?

Advocate

The most important piece of work as a community foundation is the long-term recovery process. This is where true healing and change occurs.

- Consider what role your organization might have in the long-term in advocating for applicable legislation.
- Liaise with your state and local governments to share information and ensure that all needs are being discussed and met.
- Remember that philanthropy's role in crisis is not that of a first responder. Philanthropy should determine the needs of the community, with the understanding that some of those needs are hidden and will be ongoing for a long time. For example, be willing to:
 - continue difficult conversations over the long term (racial inequality, such as what happened in Ferguson);
 - provide programs to keep children out of potentially dangerous situations (following the Baltimore riots),
 - boost mental health services (following Sandy Hook), or
 - help local businesses recover (such as after the Boston marathon bombing).
- In some cases, many different groups will need a place and time to come together and discuss difficult issues. Funders and community organizations can create safe spaces for these discussions that facilitate ongoing dialogue and move ideas forward.
- Seek ways to better inform the crisis response and look to address crucial issues at the forefront. Bring relevant data to the table and create a network for sharing your knowledge with others responding to the crisis. For example, if socioeconomic issues are in play, what data in this area has guided your grantmaking previously and can be communicated to others? Is there research you have done in that applies to community discussion or long-term legislation? And who might be best served with that information?

Remember

The Center for Disaster Philanthropy is here to assist you. Reach out to CDP's staff before or after a disaster has struck your community. We are ready to provide thought-leadership, advice on establishing disaster funds, and connections to colleagues around the nation who can support and inform your efforts.

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