

# Local Chamber Recovery

It is critical for chambers to respond quickly after a disaster. For example, using immediate media attention to highlight what's needed or declare open for business, expanding partnerships, and continuing to represent the voice of businesses in the community recovery decision making are significant. Many of these activities should be started before a disaster strikes to establish the chamber as the go-to organization. Chambers play an essential role in the private sector recovery as well as the overall community's recovery. This Quick Guide will help you respond to a disaster, assist affected businesses, and organize community and business recovery. For more details, visit [www.uschamberfoundation.org/ccf](http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/ccf).



## LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CHAMBER NETWORK

- Call the Disaster Help Desk at 1-888-MY BIZ HELP (1-888-692-4943), or return its calls and emails, it is available to help you and your member businesses. Also visit [www.facebook.com/usccfhelpdesk](http://www.facebook.com/usccfhelpdesk).
- While individual and family needs are the immediately priority, move as quickly as possible to get resources for businesses. It may be as simple as providing a list of general contractors and open office supply stores. Show businesses that their recovery is important.
- In a federally declared disaster, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has loan programs but no grants. Regardless, include the SBA details in resources that you provide your members.
- Reach out to your members. Communication may be difficult, you may have to physically visit them. Give them resources and listen to their needs.
- Track data for weeks, months, or years on each business affected. Many chambers tracked businesses for 18 months or longer. For each business track the name of the firm; contact information; location; status (destroyed, heavily damaged, light damage, no damage, open or not); new location; date reopened; date moved back to original location if applicable; resources they applied for; losses in dollars; employees pre- and post-storm; log of each time chamber contacted. The goal is to create an annual snapshot from year to year, issues or opportunities the businesses faced and their recovery process.
- Encourage businesses to register with the SBA for federal disaster assistance, even if they don't think they want an SBA loan. There is no obligation to accept funds. It is better to be registered and have options, rather than miss the registration deadline altogether.
- Look for long- and short-term funds to support businesses. If you have a 501(c)(3) foundation as part of the chamber, use it to set up a fund to support small businesses. Promote the fund as maintaining jobs, as many people don't understand the importance of businesses until jobs go away. If you don't have a chamber foundation, partner with an economic development group or community foundation.

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Chambers should participate in any recovery events immediately following the disaster, such as a Recovery Forum. These events bring together all of the agencies at local, state, federal levels. It is a great opportunity to get to know the other players as well as have them get to know the chamber.

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- Ask other chambers to commit to joining as a member of your chamber.
- If you need help from a chamber with experience handling disasters, do not hesitate to ask. Some chamber staff, members, and their Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) are able to provide immediate assistance.



## ORGANIZING AND GOVERNANCE

Following a disaster, various task forces and committees form at the federal, state, and local levels. The most common is the Long-Term Recovery Organization (LTRO) or Committee (LTRC). If an LTRO is not set up, work with local government to create one. How to get started and coordinate among these entities can be daunting. Here are lessons learned:

- Recovery typically focuses on individuals, not businesses, and while the SBA provides loans, that is often not enough. Chamber leadership can help.
- Chambers should work with local government and community partners to ensure that the chamber has a seat on community recovery committees, such as the LTRO.
- Chambers can play a crucial role in planning for the return of businesses. They can also play a role in reestablishing interconnected functions like community centers, schools, workforce housing, and transportation routes, which are support mechanisms for getting businesses back up and fully functional. Recovery requires interconnectivity between public, private, nonprofit, and community organizations.
- Use or establish your chamber's communications system to collect feedback from, and to understand your members' needs and share this information with your community partners.
- The LTRO works to address issues in all facets of the community. This may not seem relevant to the chamber, but because of our interconnected economy, all community systems are important. For example, where temporary housing is located will have a direct impact on employees, especially if the housing is located outside the community. The chamber can raise these types of issues.
- After extensive public meetings and input, the LTRO will publish its recommendations for recovery. This will become the action plan where funding will be a component, so chamber input is important.
- Typically, the committee will continue its work with core members for at least a year. We recommend the chamber stay involved to maintain the business voice.



## MEDIA STRATEGY

- After disasters, you will need to work with the media. Develop a media relations plan with three parts: a target audience, a communications objective, and a message to the media.
- Treat the media as a partner in sharing your information. Build a relationship. The better you know each other, the easier it is to respond to requests in ways that meet

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After the Joplin tornado, the chamber recovery site used five volunteers experienced in professional social media management, marketing, PR, crisis intervention, IT, journalism, copywriting, construction, logistics, and nursing.

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everyone's objectives and ensure that the correct messages reach businesses and the public.

- Reporters want images. Consider what photo-ops may exist or how you can tell the recovery story visually.
- National and local media may be interested during the first few days or weeks of a disaster, but then will move on. Even in the early stages, keep a focus on longer-term recovery. Personal stories, compelling visuals, and milestone events will help keep the recovery alive. Be creative as affected businesses will need the attention.
- Update reporters frequently. Hold press briefings often so that you can reach all reporters at one time with what relevant. Contact local government's emergency management or economic development offices to be a part of their press briefings, which are likely to be well attended. This will remind the media of the needs and issues affecting businesses.
- Use social media to keep everyone updated. Reporters can use your Facebook page or Twitter feed as a source of information.
- Social media is not 9 to 5, it's 24/7. Especially after a disaster, and staffing needs to be responsive.
- Use hashtags (e.g., #recovery, #rebuild) to focus attention where it is needed and to keep the conversation going.
- Post streaming and recorded videos on recovery topics, e.g., where to find resources, or the story of a business hit by disaster and how it's recovering. Put a face to your disaster to personalize it.
- The Media can help share information about recovery, including the needs, so keep them in the loop.
- Work with the media to celebrate milestones, especially where companies, services, or areas are open for business.

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Before a disaster, consider how you can assist your community's businesses. Work with a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) or other partners who counsel businesses. Combine with your existing resources to provide value added before and after disaster.

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## FUNDRAISING APPROACH

Tips and tactics for raising money to keep the chamber afloat during a difficult time.

- After a disaster, act quickly to launch a campaign to get assistance.
- Use a variety of fundraising methods to reach different people with convenient options, including text-to-give, online, writing a check, and giving kiosks. Relate fundraising to how the chamber helps businesses and the community.
- Set realistic timelines for both raising and using funds, keeping in mind how long it will take to receive funds.
- Due to fundraising scams, consider building into your campaign validation of your effort through promotion by an authority figure.
- Be transparent, specific, and accountable to your donors.
- Use photos, videos, or other tools to grab your audience and show how funds will be used. Have chamber employees, board members, or staff tell their stories to make it more personal.
- Engage major donors to get more involved on a committee or your board. Have them come on-site to see chamber activity during recovery.



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- Be conscious of timing so that your request doesn't conflict with other campaigns asking for immediate relief needs. However, don't wait until after public attention has shifted from the disaster entirely.
- Use social networks like Facebook and Twitter by creating a page or account specific to the fundraiser and create specific hashtags to increase awareness of your fundraiser, e.g., #chamberfund.
- When the disaster is over, thank donors and let them know how things are going at the chamber.



### ESTABLISHING A RECOVERY FUND

- After disasters, certain nonprofits will be selected by local government to work directly with impacted individuals and families. This is called disaster case management. After a disaster, a disaster case manager helps people work through recovery strategies and how to get back on their feet. While designed for individuals, a few communities have modified the approach to serve businesses, called business case management.
- Business Long-Term Recovery was the first-of-its-kind business case management developed to assist small businesses in Cedar Rapids, Iowa after the 2008 floods. The report describes what was developed, recovery timelines, partners, funding, resources, case examples, and more. <http://bit.ly/1uKJ6Wo>
- National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) Disaster Case Management Guidelines (see disaster case management section). [www.nvoad.org/resource-center](http://www.nvoad.org/resource-center)
- Disaster Case Management Program Guidance (FEMA): <http://1.usa.gov/1xBxh4>.
- Article with good case management software options. <http://bit.ly/1t8Q02F>



### VOLUNTEER AND NONPROFIT MATCHMAKING

- If you have your own volunteer program that manages preidentified volunteers and their specific skills (e.g., accounting, web developers, fundraising, sales, construction), contact volunteer matchmaking organizations to share your volunteer details. These matchmakers will connect those volunteers with the nonprofits that best fit their skills. Types of skills needed may change in a post-disaster environment, so consider reaching out to employees for newly demanded skills.
- If you don't have an existing volunteer program, point staff, businesses, and interested others to matchmaker organizations so that they can connect directly.
- Organizations that connect individuals and companies with volunteer opportunities:
  - HandsOn Network—<http://bit.ly/1xLZMww>
  - Lead Pro Bono, from the Taproot Foundation—<http://bit.ly/1oZdn2Z>
  - VolunteerMatch—[www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org)
- Sample Volunteer Liability Waiver forms. But before you use any waiver, seek proper legal counsel from the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Program. <http://bit.ly/1ng4GKX>



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## CASE MANAGEMENT

- After disasters, local governments will select some nonprofits to work directly with impacted individuals and families. This is called disaster case management. A disaster case manager helps people work through recovery strategies and how to get back on their feet. While designed for individuals, some communities have modified the approach to assist the private sector, called business case management.
- If businesses don't know where to start their recovery, point them to the Disaster Help Desk 888-MY BIZ HELP (1-888-692-4943) or [www.facebook.com/usccfhelpdesk](http://www.facebook.com/usccfhelpdesk).
- Connect with your partners to plan what resources will be made available to businesses and communicate those resources. If this is new to you, consider the following:
  - Reach out to Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), and local economic development offices.
  - A first-of-its-kind business case management system was developed to assist small businesses after flooding in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. <http://bit.ly/1uKJ6Wo>
  - National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) has disaster case management guidelines in the case management section. <http://www.nvoad.org/resource-center>
  - FEMA's case management overview and worksheet. <http://1.usa.gov/1xBxh4>

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Businesses need your leadership as their voice and advocate. Most have never been through a disaster and will struggle to even address the basics.

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## MENTAL HEALTH

Disaster survivors suffered a trauma. Resources are available to help minor to severe trauma, enabling people to express their experiences and emotions. Ignoring the problem only makes them worse.

- American Psychological Association—Works with the Red Cross on crisis counseling. <http://bit.ly/14NIQgN>
- Traumatic Stress: How to Recover from Disasters and other Traumatic Events. <http://bit.ly/1rHlyBL>
- Free 24/7 support from the Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746. TTY for Deaf or Hearing Impaired: 1-800-846-8517. <http://rdcrss.org/1hsTafJ>



## CELEBRATE MILESTONES

- Celebrating milestones during long-term disaster recovery is an important aspect of community recovery. Local chamber can lead this effort.
- The community recovery process is immense, stressful, and labor intensive. When people are burdened by recovery efforts, celebrating milestones may seem frivolous. An often-overlooked element of recovery is the need to assure people that their hard work has a purpose, progress is being made, and there is light at the end of the tunnel.



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- Anniversaries are an easy milestone to celebrate, but not the only ones. The opening or reopening of hospitals, schools, iconic community locations like restaurants, civic spots, memorials, businesses, or areas that have prevailed against adverse odds are important as well. These milestones tell the story of the community working together, building back better and stronger.
- When celebrating milestones, such as highlighting a “We’re Open for Business” campaign, be sensitive to other areas of the community that may still be experiencing difficulties.

For more information on any of these topics, visit [www.uschamberfoundation.org/ccf](http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/ccf).



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