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LESSON LEARNED

Community Resilience: Moore, Oklahoma, Tornado Response and Recovery

SUMMARY

The *Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* team identifies lessons learned derived from real-world events or exercises within the whole community, and documents them for emergency managers to consider when developing their own plans and exercises.

On May 20, 2013, an EF-5 tornado struck various towns in Oklahoma, including the City of Moore. The [tornado](#) crossed two counties, destroyed homes, leveled businesses, claimed 24 lives, and injured 212 people in a trail of destruction spanning 14 miles. It was [the deadliest tornado](#) of 2013. While Moore was still recovering from the first storm, a second tornado struck the greater Oklahoma City area on May 31, 2013. This tornado—the widest in recorded history—[claimed eight lives](#) and caused widespread crop and property damage.



Moore, OK – Disaster Recovery Center setup to help residents impacted by tornado
(Source: FEMA Photo Library,
<https://www.fema.gov/blog/2013-05-23/oklahoma-tornadoes-update-photos-ground>)

Influenced by lessons learned from the response to a similar tornado in Joplin, Missouri, the Moore Chamber of Commerce formed a partnership with a local business to facilitate community meetings, providing vital recovery information to survivors; disseminating important and timely messages regarding aid; and offering tangible assistance to the community alongside other organizations from the whole community. These actions improved Moore's resilience during recovery activities and hastened efforts to rebuild from the tragedy.

DESCRIPTION

The Moore Chamber of Commerce and the Moore First American Bank—a local, family-owned business—were inspired by a partnership created by the Joplin Chamber of Commerce following the Joplin tornado in 2011. They formed a private sector partnership to quickly address vital community needs and begin the recovery process. Due to their close relationships with the community and familiarity with local needs, the Moore Chamber of Commerce and First American Bank were well positioned to lead whole community partners during Moore's recovery process. Both organizations used their local networks to complement other whole community response efforts and provide central locations for the community to connect with available recovery resources.

LLIS.gov defines a Lesson Learned as a positive or negative experience derived from an actual incident, operation, training, or exercise obtained from a validated After Action Report or interview.

The Moore Chamber of Commerce and First American Bank organized and sponsored nine town hall style meetings at community venues donated by businesses, local colleges, libraries, and the City of Moore, to share plans for long-term and near-term recovery efforts such as school openings and debris removal. The meetings were originally designed to provide the community with context for the city's high-level recovery plans, to explain how to obtain available resources for the entire community's broader recovery. Over time, these town hall meetings evolved to also include opportunities for citizens to connect with non-profit organizations and government agencies who were already providing recovery resources, such as FEMA, the Small Business Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the American Red Cross, the local accounting association, and local schools.

These centralized venues gave whole community partners additional opportunities to communicate with survivors, while providing broader, community-wide strategic information. Representatives from FEMA discussed the many disaster assistance programs the agency was already providing, and how the "sequence of delivery" for Federal aid fit into the strategic context of community recovery being discussed by local leaders. Citizens had the opportunity to meet on-site with FEMA Disaster Survivor Assistance Teams to register for assistance and receive information on how to apply for other Federal benefits. Similarly, representatives from other whole community partners answered specific questions from survivors, addressed individual concerns, and helped residents apply for aid and relief services. Agency representatives brought interpreters and translated materials to ensure information was accessible and understandable for everyone. Similar in nature to a Disaster Recovery Center, these meetings fostered collaborative dialogue about community-wide recovery efforts, provided additional opportunities to connect survivors with recovery services, and created a foundation for ongoing community recovery efforts and discussions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Towns with private sector institutions that maintain close ties to the surrounding community can establish similar partnerships through pre-disaster planning or on an ad hoc basis in the wake of an event. Private sector entities such as businesses with unique capabilities and resources, or private clubs with large memberships can work alongside emergency responders. In this way, private sector involvement provides local familiarity to Federal agencies involved in recovery activities and a trusted partner for the community. In turn, this strategy improves the overall community resilience in the aftermath of disasters. Alongside FEMA recovery efforts, private sector engagement enhances accurate assessments of community needs, provides local perspectives for a tailored approach to response activities, and ultimately contributes to a quicker recovery for the community overall.

Meeting Announcement Outreach

Since the storm severely impacted Moore's critical infrastructure, the bank and the Chamber of Commerce developed a communications strategy to ensure awareness of community meetings. The strategy included:

- Social media;
- Announcements on national television outlets;
- Newspaper announcements; and
- Flyers distributed by the Chamber's member network at hotels where displaced residents were staying.

This strategy enabled FEMA and other recovery agencies to disseminate their messaging to a wider audience, provide information about access to critical resources, and connect citizens with needed services.

REFERENCES

James T. Cole. FEMA Region 6 Private Sector Liaison. Personal Interview. May 20, 2014.

Suzanne McAuley. Senior Vice President of Marketing & Community Relations. First American Bank. Personal Interview. January 9, 2014.