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Long Term Recovery Committees: Lessons Learned from the 2009 Georgia Floods

September 28, 2015

SUMMARY

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)-staffed Long Term Recovery Committees (LTRCs) are an essential part of the housing recovery process in Georgia. Based on lessons learned from the 2009 floods, Georgia VOAD improved the LTRC process resulting in a faster recovery and repopulation of homes in subsequent disasters.

DESCRIPTION

Between September 18 and October 9, 2009, heavy rains in the Atlanta metropolitan area caused a 500-year flood event. Rising waters caused more than \$500 million in damages, affected some 20,000 homes, businesses and other buildings, and killed 10 people. As a result, 23 Georgia counties received Federal disaster declarations.



Flooded homes in central Georgia following heavy rain from September 20-21, 2009.

(Source: FEMA Image Library, <https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/56043>)

Following the floods, the State turned to Georgia VOAD, an umbrella organization that coordinates efforts between the voluntary organizations that comprise its membership. The *Georgia Housing Strategy* gives Georgia VOAD the responsibility for standing up volunteer-staffed LTRCs. Georgia VOAD establishes LTRCs, as needed, in localities affected by disaster. Depending on the size of the disaster there can be one or more LTRCs operational at the same time. These LTRCs carry out debris removal, damage assessments, and temporary and permanent housing repairs. A primary focus of LTRCs is to address the housing-related needs of families and individuals that insurance and disaster assistance programs do not meet.

Lessons Learned from 2009 Flooding

During the 2009 flood recovery process, Georgia VOAD and its member organizations spent three to five weeks setting up LTRCs in the affected areas. After the process, Georgia VOAD leadership assessed where they could improve the LTRC stand-up process, to improve future disaster recovery efforts. They found that:

- Securing a steady source of funds and identifying the necessary leadership staff are the most important factors affecting how long it took to stand up an LTRC;

- Ensuring a steady and immediate source of funding means a lack of materials or personnel will not impede recovery work as the LTRC receives requests for damage assessments and assistance; and
- Pre-identifying a leadership cadre minimizes organizational issues, provides clear direction for the LTRC, ensures meetings occur on a regular basis, and guarantees that actual recovery work can begin as quickly as possible.

As a result of this assessment, Georgia VOAD mandated that in future disasters volunteer groups setting up LTRCs take the following steps before carrying out any other recovery-related actions:

1. Appoint an LTRC president to convene meetings and organize the committee;
2. Appoint a secretary to record minutes and arrange further meetings; and
3. Partner with a 501(c)(3) charitable organization to ensure that the LTRC has a steady source of funding to purchase supplies and hire non-volunteer personnel, if necessary.

Applying LTRC Lessons Learned During 2011 Tornado Outbreak

On April 27–28, 2011, 15 tornados struck northern Georgia. The related storms killed 13 people, damaged hundreds of homes, and resulted in a Presidential Disaster Declaration for the State. By implementing the three-step process identified above first, LTRCs were operational in the affected counties within a week. This represented a significant decrease in operational stand-up time from the 2009 floods and allowed housing recovery efforts to begin almost immediately after the response phase concluded.

Georgia VOAD continued to improve the LTRC process by creating Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COADs) in 20 counties across the State. These COADs include a pre-identified LTRC president, secretary, and 501(c)(3) partner organization so that operations can begin immediately should a disaster strike. Georgia VOAD is now working to implement local COADs in all 159 Georgia counties.

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