HARVARD Kennedy School
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

Before Disaster Hits:
Top Items a Local Government Needs in Place
to Launch Effective Community Recovery

1. Adoption of a **comprehensive recovery ordinance** (i.e., City of LA ordinance, mandated Florida local recovery plans) that links recovery/resilience efforts in the government, community, lifeline, business/private and non-profit sectors. Establishment of a **recovery council** that is integral to overall plan development to ensure equitable and active participation. This plan should reference the jurisdiction's pre-disaster scenario, peer-reviewed loss estimates, General Plan Safety element and hazard mitigation plans.

2. **Post-disaster governance plan**—legislative, executive and administrative contingency framework which includes specified procedures for convening the governing body in alternate circumstances and designated replacement officials to enable COG functions in the on-going recovery period.

3. **Decision-making matrix** for governing body that integrates community process and partnership.

4. **Lifeline Council** convened beforehand with chief executives of the jurisdiction and utility agencies regularly meeting to develop procedures on decision-making, restoration of service, and use/deployment of contingency systems. **Agreed upon plan to ensure rapid restoration of essential community systems—**power, and sanitary sewer particularly important; clean water system second.

5. **Housing strategies**—shelter-in-place, emergency, short-term and interim housing (includes adoption of appropriate ordinances for altered land use, zoning and open space regulations; pre-qualification of installation contractors and sub-contractors.

6. **Pre-event MOU established with ICMA** to send in rotating support teams of experienced executive and senior staff from other jurisdictions to "scaffold" existing staff and provide consultative, effective back-up.

7. **Development of coherent, unified community information and outreach initiative** that folds in capacity for interactive, culturally competent dialogue with residents, other levels of government.

8. **Established relationship with senior state OES and FEMA (regional and HQ) staff** to ensure responsive recovery operations.

9. **Fiscal and economic plans in place**—initially for city/local government fiscal continuity—this includes relaxation of bidding requirements as needed for a capped period of time; increased fiscal authority for chief administrative officer for defined period and types of contract authority (capital project, services and supplies and equipment). The local controller develops a post-event strategy to address interim and long-term recovery with financial institutions, rating agencies, and governmental regulators.

10. **Adoption of pre-event repair and reconstruction ordinance**; most recent iteration of the IBC with appropriate local amendments that address specific regional hazards, risk conditions. Having these in place gives community best eligibility opportunities for FEMA, state and federal agency assistance.

11. **Designate an internal liaison/negotiations team** to directly interact with state OES, FEMA and other federal agency representatives. This group needs **substantive** pre-event training on the state and federal response and recovery regulations as well as **targeted negotiations training**.

12. **Immediate establishment of a one-stop recovery shop** that is hub of governmental and non-profit support for the community. The function of this effort evolves over time but is operated to address changing needs, incorporating all community links—311, web access, CERT and NEN support systems.

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Launching Community Recovery When Disaster Strikes

1. Convene the jurisdiction's recovery council—this is a group with representatives with widespread representation from government (both elected and appointed officials), community, business and non-profit leaders. Along with the community's governing body, this group examines the community conditions, assesses long-term recovery initiatives and builds support for effective, implementable strategies.

2. Obtain and adopt model legislation to ensure your community has state-of-the-art building codes, performance standards, and recovery/reconstruction authority codified to hasten disaster recovery assistance from governmental agencies.

3. Assemble with regional decision makers to develop larger-scale approaches to the situation. Recovery will be region-dependent in a landscape-scale disaster, so working partnerships with other jurisdictions and regional institutions and bodies will promote a quicker return.

4. Invite state OES and FEMA staff representatives to meet with local, county and state elected representatives and community leaders to initiate recovery of the built environment through public assistance and mitigation funding programs.

5. Review materials from the State Office of Emergency Services and FEMA (Long-term Recovery Manual and other resources guidance available online). Materials are available from the state and regional offices that outline immediate steps to initiate recovery, as well as some best practice material.

6. Draw upon the experience of other disaster-hit communities through the ICMA, National League of Cities, the American Planning Association (APA), the Public Entity Risk Institute (PERI) and academic resource institutions (examples here—HKS; UC Boulder; U of Delaware).

7. Ensure community resilience by launching a recovery planning process that makes sense for your area—some resources include FEMA's assistance through the ESF 14 process or launching a complementary general plan or redevelopment planning process consistent with recovery needs.

8. Look into getting direct support from disaster-experienced government officials through ICMA and the state-level League of Cities. These groups can provide onsite "mutual aid" for executive staff and bolster local capacity.

9. Develop a consultative relationship with the community through the recovery planning process, as well as through frequent, consistent visits to neighborhood-based gatherings, town hall meetings and public briefings.

10. Seek support from the philanthropic community to supplement financial needs not typically covered by government funding to bolster non-profit community organizations supporting the most at-risk community members.

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