How quickly your organization can get back to work after a fire, tornado or flood often depends on the emergency planning you do today.

When you were a kid, your school conducted fire drills so that everyone knew where to go in the event of an emergency. It's no different for your nonprofit. You have to plan for the unexpected – even the unthinkable – so that everyone knows how to react to protect lives, minimize damage and get back to work as quickly as possible.

Others may be depending on your organization's rapid response.

A commitment to planning today protects your nonprofit and gives it a better chance for getting quickly back in action. If your organization survives a disaster, your employees keep their jobs, and your mission stays intact.

According to David Paulison, former executive director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), roughly 40 percent to 60 percent of small businesses never reopen their doors following a disaster.

How long could your organization operate without electricity, the Internet, or a key supporter? Could your nonprofit continue with roads closed by a flood or earthquake or local beaches and fishing areas closed because of oil? Many people think the threat is always elsewhere, that disaster cannot possibly happen in their own back yard.

Here are four steps you can take to develop a disaster recovery plan for your organization:

1. **Meet with an insurance agent who understands your organization.** Are your key assets covered for their full replacement cost? Normal hazard insurance often does not cover floods or earthquakes, so make sure you have the right kind of insurance.

   Most important: Make sure you know what your insurance does not cover. Are you prepared to relocate temporarily?

2. **Make sure everyone knows what to do in case of an emergency.** Do all employees and volunteers know where emergency exits are located? Have you appointed someone who is responsible for making sure all the fire extinguishers work?

   Communicate your evacuation plan to all employees and regularly practice safety drills.

3. **Keep copies of important records off site.** Are copies of all vital records saved on both the hard drive and backup diskettes at an off-site location at least 50 miles away from the main site? Many key business records are irreplaceable or would be difficult or expensive to re-create.

See **Is your disaster plan in place?** *on back*

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Connecting with

How to delegate to volunteers for best results

Delegation is one of the most important skills of successful managers. It lets them spend less time on routine tasks and more time being a leader and a planner.

> **To keep volunteers motivated and willing to work hard, you have to take into consideration the kinds of rewards they are seeking.**

As a manager, you no doubt know the benefits of delegating some of your work to your staff.

But as a manager of a nonprofit, perhaps you also have volunteers that you could delegate to at times.

What is the main difference between volunteers and paid staff?

It is, of course, that volunteers are not paid. Not with money, anyway.

It is easy to delegate to paid staff because they are being paid to do whatever work they are assigned by their manager.

It is more complicated with volunteers. To keep them motivated and willing to work hard, you have to take into consideration the kinds of rewards – or "compensation" – they are seeking. Then try to delegate the right tasks to the right people.

Some volunteers are looking for social opportunities. They want to meet new people and interact with others. You should delegate tasks to them that afford such opportunities.

Others volunteer because they want to make a difference. Give them tasks in which they can accomplish something tangible – where they can see the results of their efforts.

Still others want recognition. For them, it matters less what kind of work you give them than that you recognize their efforts and express your appreciation.

Some volunteer in a specific field because they want to learn the skills in that field. Or they may see it as a way to get their foot in the door for a career. They are motivated to make contacts with people who might give them a reference or tips on places that are hiring.

Some volunteer because they enjoy the nature of the activity and they would not be able to do it otherwise. Maybe it's working with animals, speaking to immigrants in their native language, or being around the theater or museum.

The list could go on and on.

Guidelines for Successful Delegation

Before you delegate work to your volunteers, you should get to know them. Find out what motivates them.

Make it a point to meet with each of your volunteers soon after they are "hired." Ask them what brings them to your organization. Probe what they hope to do there, what would make it a successful placement for them. Listen attentively.

Also get to know them beyond the job. What are their hobbies? What do they do in their paid job, if they have one. What are their hopes and dreams for the future?

A second preparatory step is to make volunteers feel like they are a part of the team, and not "just volunteers." Show them around the organization and introduce them to people. Include them in meetings and other events when appropriate.

The first step of delegating is to define the task and make sure it is suitable for a volunteer. Then list the key features of the task, keeping in mind the things that motivate people to volunteer. Does the task involve working with people, learning new skills, using an interesting piece of equipment, or what?

Next, select the right individual, matching what you have learned about your volunteers with your assessment of the task. Ask, don't tell. Say to the individual, "Are you comfortable doing this? It's OK if you aren't." Make it easy for them to decline the task if they wish.

If they show interest, express your confidence in them and their ability to carry it out.

Explain the results you want to achieve, rather than specifying step by step what you want them to do. It is more motivating for people to have some control over how they do a job.

Identify any resources they will need to do the job, and provide those. Ask the individual what else they need.

After assigning the task, get out of the way and let them do their job. But also follow up at appropriate intervals to see how it's going and whether they need anything from you – and to be sure they can do the job.

Finally, don't forget to give them praise and recognition. Don't wait until they're finished. Give encouragement and express your appreciation along the way.

Volunteers can be a big asset to a nonprofit organization, especially during cash-strapped times. To tap into this asset, just keep in mind what kinds of rewards are most motivating for each of your volunteers, and do your best to deliver – *Jeff Van Pelt, Ed.D., SPHR*

Efficiency improves with better communication

Too little money, too little time, too many projects.

This is the cry from many nonprofit organizations today. The economy has reduced contributions, staffing levels have been cut, and in many cases, the needs of the populations served have increased.

Efficiency has always been important in nonprofits, and today more than ever.

Communicating clearly is critical to efficiency.

Many inefficiencies result from a lack of clear communication. Here's an example that is typical in a nonprofit setting:

A staff member briefs a volunteer on an assignment and then goes back to her other many duties. The volunteer proceeds to do what he thinks was explained. At the end of the day, the staff member checks in to find that the project has been completely mishandled. The volunteer is frustrated, and the staff member is frustrated.

While this can happen between any two people, it is particularly problematic with volunteers and part-time helpers. They often lack the ongoing interaction that would help them understand the big picture around the task being assigned. They do the best they can, given their level of understanding, but the result is sometimes less than helpful.

The same can be true of board direction to the nonprofit staff. The board comes in and out of the picture over the course of the year. Board members aren't readily available for discussion and questions about the task or objective they have assigned. As a result, team members do the best they can, often to find that they were not particularly clear on the objective. This results in rework and frustration from all parties.

Communicating clearly is critical to efficiency. Here are some factors to consider when you are trying to communicate information.

1. **CONTEXT** – Does the person you're addressing have any background on the topic being discussed? We often assume that they do, or that the context isn't particularly important. For people to make good decisions, they need to understand the "why" around the "what." Explain why the task is needed. How does it fit with other tasks being performed? What will happen next? How does the task feed the bigger initiative?
2. **OUTCOMES** – What should the end product look like? We sometimes assume that people know what we want to see, when, in fact, they may have a different idea entirely. When possible, describe what the output should contain. If you're having someone develop a spreadsheet of information, lay out the column or row titles you need to see. If someone is organizing an office area, describe what the resulting "stacks" should contain. Don't assume they envision the same outcome you do.
3. **TIME FRAME** – Whether or not the task is time sensitive, explaining how long you believe the process should take will give the worker or volunteer an idea of the task's complexity. If the worker is thinking to himself that the project should take an hour, and you state that the project should take four hours, that will likely spark some important questions from the worker. The time frame indicates that you have a more complex process in mind than they have envisioned. Talking through that process will minimize missteps along the way.
4. **RED FLAGS** – Before you give an assignment, try to think of the snags that will likely occur. Are there issues or questions that usually come up? Try to head them off early. Are there checks that can be done along the way to help the worker know if he is on the right path? Explain those.

Many people will say, "I'm available if they have questions, so I don't need to take all this time up front."

Here's the problem. Many times, the volunteer or worker doesn't know what she doesn't know. She doesn't even know what to ask.

You, as the person with more information and understanding of the big picture, need to spend the time to broaden her understanding so that she can truly be the helper she desires to be.

Think about the last time someone didn't fulfill a task as efficiently as you had hoped. How well did you explain the four points above? Train yourself to give better information up front, and the efficiency of your team will improve. – *Denise Altman, CPA, M.B.A.*

Is your disaster plan in place? *continued from front*

Carefully consider what is critical to your organization, like donor lists, volunteer contacts and financial records. Current accounting records are obviously important, but historical accounting information may also be needed. Tax information, including copies of prior tax returns and your IRS exemption letter may be difficult to recover or reproduce.

4. **Establish a 'recovery communications' plan.** Designate key employees with the responsibility to contact other employees, donors, volunteers, the media, etc., to spread the word that the organization is still functional.

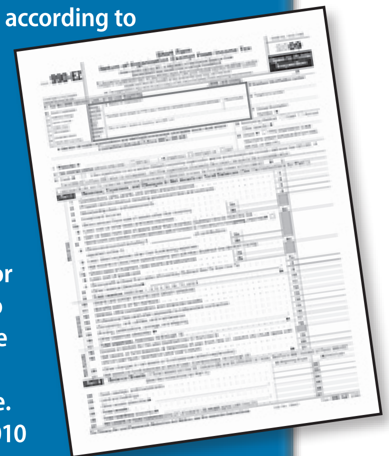
After disaster strikes, the government will provide some help, including disaster assistance and federal tax relief, to help get the community back to business.

But, as so many organizations have experienced in recent years, it takes time – sometimes months or years – for government assistance programs to become fully functional after a major disaster. By that time, it is often too late for some organizations to recover.

Having a plan in place before disaster strikes will help your nonprofit remain open and provide assistance in the wake of a major catastrophe. Make sure that you plan for the worst – and hope you never have to activate the plan. – *Michael Redemske, CPA*

Filing simpler for small groups

Small tax-exempt organizations may be able to shift to a simpler form for their 2010 annual information reporting, according to the IRS.



They may now file the e-Postcard Form 990-N rather than the standard Form 990 or Form 990-EZ. A tax-exempt organization's annual gross receipts or total assets are used to determine which of the three versions of Form 990 it is required to file.

Groups filing for 2010 that have $50,000 or less in gross receipts may file the e-Postcard. That's double the amount for 2009 when an organization had to have $25,000 or less.

More Than Money

The technical information in this newsletter is necessarily brief. No final conclusion on these topics should be drawn without further review and consultation. Please be advised that, based on current IRS rules and standards, the information contained herein is not intended to be used, nor can it be used, for the avoidance of any tax penalty assessed by the IRS.

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