

Disaster Grantmaking:

Connect, Collaborate, Consider, Communicate

Key Issues

Small foundations are uniquely positioned to respond effectively to disasters. Why? Among other reasons, they combine the quick flexibility of a small board with the public presence and permanence of an institution. To be most effective in a disaster situation, plan ahead, get sound legal advice, and consider the strategies outlined here.

Terms

- **Disaster management.** A holistic response to disaster that includes all phases of the response.
- **Relief.** The first phase of a disaster. Survivors may immediately need rescue, food, shelter, or clothing to survive. This phase is intense, but it is over quickly, usually within a few days.
- **Recovery.** The second phase of a disaster, which may last several months. The focus is on setting up infrastructure to sustain the victims.
- **Reconstruction.** The third phase of a disaster, which lasts months or even years. Physical infrastructure, such as roads, schools, and hospitals, needs to be rebuilt; human infrastructure also needs funding for skilled providers.
- **Preparedness.** Preparing for disaster can minimize its impact. When making these grants, you might fund long-term community and economic development programs.
- **Prevention.** Some experts believe that disasters are the result of social, political, and economic factors, and that disasters can actually be prevented. To fund prevention, you might grant for conflict resolution, refugee assistance, or research on root causes of disasters.

Decisions for Your Board

Experts and experience have shown that the most effective grantmaking in response to a disaster includes four Cs:

Connect with a good source of information about the disaster. Local organizations are already at the scene, know best what is needed, and understand the complex political, social, and cultural context. You might call on:

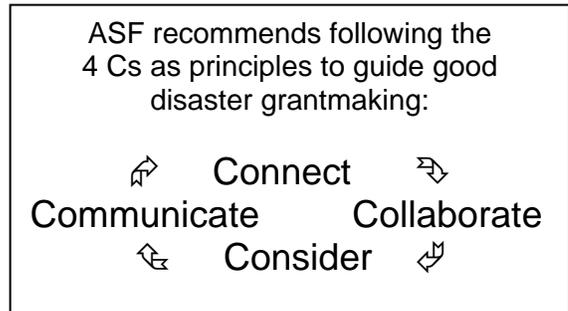
- The local regional association of grantmakers
- Local charities (or U.S.-based international aid groups)
- Governmental agencies working in the area

Collaborate with others. Don't act in isolation from other grantmakers, humanitarian and aid organizations, and local charitable groups. Connect with:

- Other grantmaking foundations
- Local or international charitable organizations, such as churches or activist groups
- Regional associations of grantmakers
- Government agencies

Consider the impact of your grantmaking on the big picture and your vision for full recovery from the disaster. Think about what is needed in the short term and long term, which may include:

- Food, clothing, housing, and emergency medical treatment
- Counseling, family communication and reconnection
- Rebuilding schools, hospitals, roads
- Strengthening the capacity of local charities



Once you've made a grant, don't stop there. **Communicate** and follow through, including:

- Thinking about your grantees' ongoing needs
- Communicating the results of your work to other grantmakers
- Evaluating successes and missteps with your board

Questions for Outsiders

Legally, it's simplest to give to traditional U.S.-based charities in times of disasters. If you are making grants to traditional charities that are based in the United States (including U.S.-based international intermediaries), you should verify their tax-exempt status as you would with any other grant. Get sound legal advice before giving directly to individuals or other types of organizations, such as governments, businesses, or internationally based groups.

Action Items

Take the time to craft strategic policies in advance of a disaster; this can make it much easier for your foundation to know when and how to respond when a disaster strikes. The process can be as simple as a conversation with your board or as formal as developing a written Disaster Relief Plan that considers your mission, what you will fund, potential grant recipients, and likely partners. Such planning will give you confidence that you are in agreement about what to do if a disaster arises and improve the impact and effectiveness of your grantmaking.

Additional Resources

- "Disaster Grantmaking Strategies: Response & Prevention for Small Foundations," www.smallfoundations.org/Primers
ASF primer that helps you prepare for the next disaster and respond effectively
- Fields of Interest: Disaster Relief, www.smallfoundations.org/Box/Grantmaking
Complimentary online resources for ASF members
- "Giving That Transforms: In the Aftermath of Major Disaster," www.smallfoundations.org/Essentials (Winter 2005)
Article from the ASF quarterly newsletter, *Essentials*

DISCLAIMER: The Association of Small Foundations cannot be held liable for the information provided in this tear sheet. We strongly encourage you to consult your attorney to ensure compliance with federal and state laws.