

WHAT TO DO **BEFORE** YOU DO ACTUALLY DO ANYTHING

It seems that everyone is anxious to respond to our current situation. And, that is not a bad thing at all. However, too many organizations and individuals can do more harm than good and waste resources if they don't follow these simple concepts before actually doing anything. If you follow these concepts you are more likely to have a positive outcome than if you simply dive right into any project or partnership.

BEFORE the project:

- Determine what you or your church are capable of doing. Know your limits and current resources. During a disaster many of the resources we typically take for granted (including volunteers, funds, transportation, building space, availability etc.) are not as readily available. Review your capabilities under the current circumstances so you know your new capacities, limitations, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Confirm that the project you desire to do is an ACTUAL need and not merely a perceived one. Just because one church or organization is doing one thing in one geographic region does not mean this is a need in your specific community. And remember, hearsay from an individual or the internet may not be reliable confirmation. In almost any disaster there are so many people desiring to help and so many things happening at one time that many organizations can't keep up with who is doing what. They may have posted that need two days ago but someone else already met that need and the organization has not had the ability to update their website. Verbal or written confirmation is best.
- Once the need is confirmed, ask about the details of the project to be certain that your church can accomplish the task properly. Remember to take into consideration all the limitations mentioned earlier.
- Enlist at least one other person from your church who is aware of all the details. In this way, should something come up unexpectedly to one of the leaders, there is another person ready to step in and lead.
- Make certain all parties involved are clear on the expectations. This could be accomplished through a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Covenant agreement.
 - Is this a one-time project or ongoing?
 - Is the limitation on funding, materials, hours, volunteers, etc. clear?
 - Can you share information regarding your church?
 - How will the Gospel be shared that does not undermine the integrity of the church nor the partnering organization?
- If this is an ongoing project, be certain to set a date to revisit the details of the project so that adjustments can be made, or an end date can be established. You do not want to have to cancel your participation in the middle of the project because of a lack of proper planning on your part.
- DO NOT take on a project with the simple "hope" that all the details will fall into place. Of course, there may be some details that just have to be worked out over time. However, funding, the number of volunteers, and other key factors should be confirmed to avoid a potentially embarrassing (or even angering) cancellation at the last minute.

DURING the project:

- Maintain regular (but not bothersome) communication with the partnering organization to ensure no changes to the project have been made. Regular updates on progress are helpful for both parties.
- Remain open and honest. If there are any necessary changes that have to take place, communicate those changes as quickly as possible so that potential solutions can be identified and alternative plans can be made.
- Be certain to maintain any guidelines or mandates established by local, state, and federal authorities. During times of disaster, a host of guidelines can be established that could radically change the parameters of the project. And, DO NOT be cavalier in your approach should new mandates change the scope or even the possibility of the project being completed. You could bring unwanted attention to your church and the partnering organization, not to mention the risk of violating the law.

AFTER the project:

- Gather together all those involved and review the project. Be honest about any shortcomings or disappointments as well as celebrate the accomplishment.
- Be certain to thank all those involved in the project. A note, letter, or phone call will go a long way to encourage folks as well as to build trust for the next project that might come along.
- Determine how this project had an impact on the volunteers, the church, the partnering agency, and most importantly the community the project served. This information will help shape how future projects are sought after and designed. Unfortunately, there are many projects that seem good at the beginning but as it comes to a close it may have only served to make the volunteers feel better about themselves and not really having any impact on the community it was seeking to serve.
- Many times it better serves a church to establish a long term relationship with a small number of organizations rather than trying to meet every need in the community. This is where community partnership with other congregations and organizations can make a significant difference. Building relationships with the community as a whole and leading with focus and strategy will always work better than randomly choosing projects based on news cycles and the whims of individuals.