



## Building and Maintaining National Partnerships in Emergency Management

### **Lessons Learned**

*National Council on Independent Living  
(NCIL) and Portlight Strategies*

## Organizations Involved in National Partnerships for Emergency Preparedness and Response:

- Portlight Strategies
- National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)
- Department of Homeland Security, Federal  
Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Office  
of Disability Integration Coordination (ODIC)
- American Red Cross
- National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)



Portlight Strategies, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization, founded in 1997 to facilitate a variety of projects involving people with disabilities, including post-disaster relief work.

## Disaster Recovery Efforts

- Longest running disaster recovery effort followed Superstorm Sandy
- Lasted for 18 months.
- Replaced:
  - lost durable medical equipment
  - Ramping
  - assisted residents in purchasing and installing accessibility equipment necessary after their homes were elevated to meet federal flood insurance requirements.
- Have since worked with partners in California, Texas and South Carolina

## Getting it Right Conferences

- Ongoing Training program
- Working to promote self-determination of needs and issues with respect to disaster preparedness and response.
- Fostering community relationships to promote inclusiveness in disaster preparedness and response plans



- Longest-running national cross-disability, grassroots organization run by and for people with disabilities.
- Founded in 1982
- Representing thousands of organizations i.e., Centers for Independent Living and SILCs and individuals with disabilities

### **NCIL Mission:**

NCIL advances independent living and the rights of people with disabilities.

### **NCIL Vision:**

NCIL envisions a world in which people with disabilities are valued equally and participate fully

### **NCIL Committee Structure:**

Governing Board Committees, Subcommittees, Task Forces, and Caucuses ensures that the tremendous amount of work we accomplish is truly grassroots and consumer controlled.

### **NCIL's Emergency Preparedness and Response Sub-Committee:**

#### **Statement of Purpose:**

- Address the need for people with disabilities to be involved in the development, assessment, and implementation of emergency preparedness and all stages of a disaster.

## Goals:

- Educate, advocate and address the needs of people with disabilities at all stages of a disaster.
- work with agencies and partners at the federal, state, and local levels.
- assist and educate NCIL membership in advocating and collaborating on Emergency Preparedness & Management (EP/M) issues.

## Objectives:

- Work with partners on implementation of Memorandums Of Understanding or Agreements.
- Identify available resources in an emergency, share with CILs.
- Provide guidance and advocacy on negative policy
- Educate about the federal and state civil rights of people with disabilities in disasters through Position papers, articles, etc.

## FEMA's Office on Disability Integration and Coordination

**Mission:**

Leads FEMA's commitment to achieving whole community emergency management, inclusive of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, by providing guidance, tools, methods and strategies to establish equal physical, program and effective communication access.



**FEMA**



**American  
Red Cross**

**Mission:** The American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.

**Goals:**

- all people affected by disaster everywhere receive care, shelter and hope;
- communities are ready and prepared for disasters;
- everyone has access to safe, lifesaving blood and blood products;
- armed services and their families find support and comfort when needed; and
- trained individuals ready to use their Red Cross skills to save lives.

**Red Cross Community Partners:**

- Providing additional assistance on the ground, beyond the resources of the American Red Cross
- Vital link between the Red Cross and the communities we serve.

## **National Disability Rights Network (NDRN): non profit for Protection and Advocacy Systems and Client Assistance Programs**

- working to improve the lives of people with disabilities by:
  - guarding against abuse
  - advocating for basic rights
  - ensuring accountability in health care, education, employment, housing, transportation, and within the juvenile and criminal justice systems.



Emergency Preparedness and Response and the Disability Community

## **CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS**

## NCIL and PORTLIGHT

NCIL and Portlight entered into a Memorandum of Understanding in October 2013.

### **PURPOSE:**

- Working together to mobilize resources to individuals with disabilities in disaster areas through collaboration on national and local levels.

### **Cooperation:**

- Exchange information on disability demographics of the community.
- Community service providers for individuals with disabilities that might be available for assistance after a disaster.
- Work together to identify appropriate facilities such as community centers that could serve as shelters and/or service delivery sites.
- Engage Portlight Strategies, Inc. in community disaster planning as appropriate.

#### Cooperation continued:

- Enhance capacity to handle disaster response.
- Identify shelter locations to Portlight
- Ensuring introductions between the agencies and the local shelter operators.
- Post-disaster follow-up: meet for after action analysis and discuss improvement.

## NCIL and AMERICAN RED CROSS

- Negotiations to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding began in August of 2012.
- Memorandum of Understanding was signed on July 31, 2014
- Discussions regarding the *termination* of this MOU began in October, 2015 and are ongoing

## Methods of Cooperation

- Communications between organizations – s
  - share current data regarding disasters
  - situational and operational reports and
  - changes in policy or personnel relating to this MOU
- Engagement at the local level
  - Each will encourage their local representatives (CILs, local Red Cross chapters) to engage in collaborative relationships with one another

## Methods of Cooperation continued...

- Engage in Preparedness Activities -
  - Community presentations
  - develop plans for emergency preparedness i.e., exchange information on disability demographics, locate service providers, facilitate introductions and engagement of CIL's at disaster NGO meetings and forums
- Engage in Response Activities –
  - Pre-disaster planning such as accessibility surveys of shelters, determining CIL involvement and referral methods
  - ARC will create a leadership position in the disaster relief operational structure

**Cooperation continued....**

- **Recovery Activities** – When ARC leads the establishment of a Multi-Agency Recovery Center, CILS will be invited to participate. Both agencies will engage in post-disaster follow up to develop an after action report on what worked and what did not work
- **Background Checks** – are not required of CIL personnel
- **Other Cooperative actions** – any other actions necessary to ensure service to individuals with disabilities

**PORTLIGHT and AMERICAN RED CROSS**

- Duplicate of NCIL and Red Cross
- Signed January 2014
- Includes a deployment piece

## NDRN and Red Cross

- Memorandum of Understanding signed in September 2010
- Almost an exact replica of the MOU with NCIL and Portlight – changing NCIL to NDRN, CAP and P&As

## NCIL and FEMA

- Cooperative agreement signed in July of 2010
- FEMA to provide NCIL with access to Disaster Recovery Centers after a disaster to offer disaster assistance services to individuals with disabilities and households
- NCIL staff will have access to FEMA's Joint Field Office for purposes related to this MOU.

## PORTLIGHT and FEMA

- Engage in joint disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation activities to support universal accessibility and community resilience
- Facilitate speaking requests of subject matter experts to provide community organization engagement and provide emergency management expertise during briefings, informational sessions, and other events

- Share relevant information, such as promising practices, research, training experience, and expertise, before, during, and after disasters
- Engage in joint activities that promote efficient, accessible and effective public service in emergency management

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Before entering into an MOU or Partnership Agreement with another entity, first determine:
  - Is a formal, written partnership really necessary?
  - Ensure that the partnering organizations has a full understanding of the operational structure of the other.
  - Appoint specific individuals to coordinate the relationship and conduct follow up and follow through if it will not be directors or signers of the agreement.

### Lessons Learned continued...

Specific to emergency preparedness and response:

- Establishing local connections between disaster relief organizations and the disability community BEFORE a disaster is imperative.
  - It's the boots on the ground that will get things done quickly in a disaster setting, not the top level administration in DC
  - Top level admin will generally defer to the local representatives because they are the ones dealing with the immediate issues. If the locals don't want to play, you're not getting anywhere.

### Lessons Learned continued:

- Key players in the wake of disaster are NOT the contacts you have in negotiating an MOU. However, national staff can and should facilitate introductions.
- Local emergency management agencies and relief/recovery organizations are often unaware of community resources for working with and assisting people with disabilities, particularly with respect to CILs. Establishing and maintaining blue-sky relationships facilitates inclusive planning and preparedness, which ultimately benefits the whole community.

### Where are we now?

- NCIL and FEMA – **very** strong working relationship, pre and post disaster.
- NCIL and Red Cross – EP Sub-committee has recommended termination of the MOU to the NCIL Board. NCIL Board and ARC administration have met. Discussions ongoing
- Portlight and FEMA – **very** strong, working relationship.
- Portlight and Red Cross – discussions ongoing as to whether MOU will be renewed. Recent deplorable situations in ARC operations seems to be making necessary and recommended changes.