NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

Sustaining Your Organization During a Disaster

Factsheet

During disasters and emergencies, disruptions to local services, housing, economic stability, and social connections can further increase risk for exploitation. An organization (or community) is best equipped to seamlessly serve individuals at risk of trafficking or those who are currently experiencing trafficking if they have emergency plans in place before a disaster occurs. The abbreviated tool below was created by the National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center (NHTTAC) on behalf of the HHS Office on Trafficking in Persons and is part of a package of quick reference fact sheets for frontline providers in preparation for, during, and after any disaster or emergency. A brief explanation is provided, along with a link to more.

Proactively establishing emergency plans to have in place before, during, and after disasters is vital to sustaining your organization. Disasters will almost always impede everyday programming. The chances of seamlessly transitioning services for clients are higher if survivor input is part of an organization's planning and emergency succession plans. There may be situations in which program managers or other staff are unavailable, key roles change, or team members step up to support leadership affected by the disaster. These tools will help you quickly adapt and sustain your organization during a disaster.

Survivor-Informed Organizations

Survivor engagement allows organizations to better serve clients, craft programs, identify challenges and opportunities, and achieve agency missions and mandates. Especially in times of disaster, it's important to quickly assess your organization's survivor-informed practice. Your organization's policies and procedures provide a unique opportunity to operationalize a survivor-informed approach.

Assess your organization

Instructions For each line, circle one answer (0, 1, or 2), indicating the degree to which the practice is adhered to (never, occasionally, or always). Section scores identify areas of strength and weakness; total score indicates the extent to which an individual is implementing the core competencies.	Never	Occasionally	Always
Assessment: Policies and Procedures			
Policies are clear, transparent, and easy to access for all employees and volunteers.	0	1	2
Policies and procedures on conflict resolution are clearly defined.	0	1	2
Policies outline ethical codes and guidance that ensure confidentiality for staff, consultants, and volunteers who disclose trauma.	0	1	2
Policies provide guidance on culturally sensitive and empowering language.	0	1	2
Policies are routinely reviewed, discussed, and open for feedback.	0	1	2
An employee assistance program (EAP) or similar employee wellness programs are established, and staff, consultants, and volunteers are encouraged to develop self-care plans and access assistance, if needed.	0	1	2
Policies and procedures celebrate and encourage diversity.	0	1	2
Safety measures and procedures are defined and accessible to all staff, volunteers, and consultants,	0	1	2
Section Score	**Score:**		out of **45**

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Practical Strategies and Tips

What now? How did you do? Based on the assessment results above, consider the following strategies to improve your results.

Policies should be clear, transparent, and easy to access for all employees and volunteers. Solicit feedback regularly from survivor leaders on how well current policies are working. Respond quickly to feedback—this demonstrates that organizations are listening and value survivor leaders. Be sure to frequently monitor and assess the impact of primary and secondary trauma and use this information to advise organizational practices, policies, and procedures.

Ethical Guidelines

- Information on resolving conflict using a trauma-informed framework
- A clear, scenario-based training on potential ethical conflicts in the workplace—all individuals aligned with the organization, including leadership, board members, staff, consultants, and volunteers, should take the training annually
- Ethical codes that normalize the disclosure of trauma and ensure confidentiality—each individual should remain in control of how, when, and why their personal story is shared
- Guidance on using culturally sensitive and empowering language—individuals should not be referred to as “survivors” unless they choose to self-identify in that manner and should remain in control of the language they choose to define their experience

Human Resource Guidelines

- Well-defined safety measures that ensure a safe environment and encourage individual autonomy
- Financial compensation policies that ensure fair market compensation for any time or work intended to benefit the organization
- Standards that eliminate the risk of dual relationship (e.g., supervisor and client)—dual relationships should be understood and avoided at all levels of the organization.

Self-Care Guidelines

- Information on self-care, wellness strategies, and an employee assistance program (EAP) provide a range of employee support—organizations without funding for an EAP can create internal wellness programs or reach out to partners for pro bono support
- Guidelines on optional debriefing for all staff, volunteers, and consultants who participate in speaking engagements—anyone can be impacted by traumatic stimuli and triggers look different for everyone, so do not assume a survivor leader will want to debrief but do have procedures in place that make this option accessible, confidential, and non-stigmatizing
- Guidelines for creating a physical environment that uses sensory-based resources to reduce trauma-related symptoms
- Policies and procedures are only one part of a survivor-informed organization. For more information, review NHTTAC’s Toolkit for Building Survivor-Informed Organizations.

Emergency Succession Planning

Succession planning is the thoughtful and organizational planning for transitions in key leadership positions. It supports the departing and incoming staff member for the specific role as well as the entire team. Emergency succession plans include quick must-have information and should always exist to ensure smooth transitions and continual services.

Essential Elements of Emergency Succession Plans

- Staff contact information and emergency contact information
- Contact information and relationships with partners and funders for each staff position, including partner or donor's role and history of the relationship with the organization
- Checklist of key resources, including financial resources, grant management information, grant report deadlines, and deliverables
- Passwords for each account subscription and programs, including social media, grant websites or portals, case management portals, bank accounts, general email and voicemail, or any other subscriptions

Non-Essential Elements of Emergency Succession Plans

- Organization's mission statement, history, core values, and philosophy statements
- Job descriptions and sample workplans
- Organizational chart

For more information on building emergency or long-term succession plans, review NHTTAC's Grant Management Toolkit: Building Sustainable Anti-Trafficking Programs. Additional fact sheets on continuing operations during a disaster are also available.

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