

PLANNING POST DISASTER RECOVERY: A REVIEW OF THE UNITED STATES DISASTER ASSISTANCE FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Disaster losses continue to mount in the United States and around the world. The Indian Ocean tsunami (2004), Hurricanes Katrina (2005) and Ike (2008), the Haiti earthquake (2010), and the threat of climate change-induced hazards provide stark reminders of past and future challenges, including those associated with disaster recovery. The common approach to disaster recovery in the United States is to rely on the administration of narrowly defined federal grant programs rather than the larger assistance network and the many resources it can provide. The result is typically the uncoordinated implementation of varied programs administered by different stakeholders acting in isolation.

The failure to plan for disaster recovery results in a process of rebuilding that often presages the next disaster. It also limits the collective maximization of governmental, nonprofit, and private resources, including those resources that are available at the community level. As individuals, groups, communities, and organizations routinely struggle to recover from disasters, they are beset by a duplication of effort, poor interorganizational coordination, the development and implementation of policies that are not shaped by local needs, and the spreading of misinformation. Yet the perceived value of pre-event planning for post-disaster recovery remains low.

This presentation, which is based on my recently completed book, *Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery: A Review of the United States Disaster Assistance Framework*, blends what we know about disaster recovery from the research literature and an analysis of existing practice to uncover both problems and recommended solutions. The lessons are intended for hazard scholars, practitioners, and others who have not assimilated or acted upon the existing body of knowledge, or who are unexpectedly drawn into the recovery process following a disaster. After a review of the research literature and existing policies, plans, manuals, and guidance documents, an unfortunate reality remains: disaster recovery is the least understood aspect of emergency management among both scholars and practitioners. Perhaps more disturbing is the realization that researchers pointed to this problem at least twenty-five years ago. In addition, the body of knowledge that does exist has not been effectively disseminated to those who engage in disaster recovery activities.