

# Local Chamber Preparedness

During non-disaster times, we suggest that local chambers organize a disaster plan, host programs that facilitate business preparedness, and establish their role as the voice of business in the community. This Quick Guide will help you prepare for a disaster and organize your response. Also visit [www.uschamberfoundation.org/ccc](http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/ccc) to learn more.

## TIPS TOP 10 CHAMBER PREPAREDNESS TIPS

1. Build a team to create your chamber disaster plan.
2. Gather critical documents and information needed for decision making.
3. Identify and prioritize your chamber's critical operations and processes.
4. Identify your hazards—the potential disruptions to your chamber operations.
5. Keep it simple: Build your plan and create a grab and go case.
6. Create a communications strategy and plan to use post emergency. Maintain your emergency contact lists for the board, staff, vendors, and other key contacts.
7. Recruit and train staff volunteers that keep emergency supplies and take the preparedness message home.
8. Back up and protect your vital records and data regularly. Store key data off-site.
9. Take action to mitigate the potential impact on your employees, equipment, buildings, facilities, and storage. Consider insurance and a generator.
10. Exercise, test, and update your plan. Keep your plan current.



## ORGANIZING AND GOVERNANCE

- Build strong relationships before a disaster occurs with local government representatives, such as emergency management and economic development officials. After a disaster, various task forces and committees spring up at the federal, state, and local levels—the most common being the Long-Term Recovery Organization (LTRO). Building relationships with elected officials and the public sector will establish your position on their emergency contact lists in times of disaster.
- At the LTRO, you will want to fill the seat representing businesses to ensure that post disaster decision making represents the interests of the business community.
- If an LTRO is not set up, work with the local government to create one (see Quick Guide—Chamber Recovery).

To reach key local chamber presidents from our mentor network who have experienced disasters and are willing to share lessons learned, contact the Disaster Help Desk at 1-888-MY BIZ HELP (1-888-692-4943) or visit [www.facebook.com/usccfhelpdesk](http://www.facebook.com/usccfhelpdesk). The network includes chambers in Joplin, Missouri; Galveston, Texas; Queens, New York; San Diego, California; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Manhattan, New York; and others that have been through and recovered from disasters.



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## LOCAL CHAMBER PREPAREDNESS

- To serve your member businesses and the community, the chamber needs to take steps to be better prepared for an unplanned disruption.
- How prepared are you? The Red Cross's Ready Rating provides a 123-question assessment to help organizations identify gaps and strengths and where to focus attention. [www.readyrating.org](http://www.readyrating.org)
- Consider your risks and plan accordingly.
  - If you have an earthquake risk, there are simple, low-cost ways to secure tall furniture that may fall on someone. Visit: [www.earthquakecountry.org](http://www.earthquakecountry.org)
  - If floods are a concern, install flood doors and move critical goods, inventory, and equipment out of basements or other floors that may flood.
  - If you live in an area prone to tornadoes, hurricanes, or high winds, consider installing safety glass that doesn't shatter and train your employees where to go in the event of emergency.

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April has a National Volunteer Week. Use this opportunity to acknowledge your volunteers and possibly arrange a special event that also helps the community.

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## VOLUNTEER AND NONPROFIT MATCHMAKING

- Create relationships with voluntary organizations that will respond to your community after a disaster. Contact your local VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) to establish these relationships, or visit. <http://bit.ly/1zxdvrm>
- To build community capacity, businesses and chambers can create their own volunteer programs by inviting employees to participate and complete an inventory to identify their specific skills (e.g. accounting, web development, fundraising, sales, construction). Chambers can then establish a relationship with matchmaking organizations that will connect their volunteers' skills with nonprofits in need.
- Organizations that connect individuals and companies with volunteer opportunities:
  - HandsOn Network: <http://bit.ly/1xLZMww>
  - Lead Pro Bono, from the Taproot Foundation: <http://bit.ly/1oZdn2Z>
  - Common Impact: [www.commonimpact.org](http://www.commonimpact.org)
  - VolunteerMatch: [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org)
- Sample Volunteer Liability Waiver forms. Before you use any waiver, seek proper legal counsel.
  - Non-Profit Risk Management Center: <http://bit.ly/1oZdpYP>
  - Charleston Habitat for Humanity: <http://bit.ly/1uDSOu7>
- When disaster strikes, the Disaster Help Desk 1-888-MY BIZ HELP (1-888-692-4943) or [www.facebook.com/usccfhelpdesk](http://www.facebook.com/usccfhelpdesk) can assist in the organizing of volunteers.



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## CASE MANAGEMENT

- After disasters, certain nonprofits will be selected by local government to work directly with impacted individuals and families. This is called disaster case management. After a disaster, a disaster case manager helps people work through recovery strategies and how to get back on their feet. While designed for individuals, a few communities have modified the approach to serve businesses, called business case management.
- Business Long-Term Recovery was the first-of-its-kind business case management developed to assist small businesses in Cedar Rapids, Iowa after the 2008 floods. The report describes what was developed, recovery timelines, partners, funding, resources, case examples, and more. <http://bit.ly/1uKJ6Wo>
- National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) Disaster Case Management Guidelines (see disaster case management section). [www.nvoad.org/resource-center](http://www.nvoad.org/resource-center)
- Disaster Case Management Program Guidance (FEMA): <http://1.usa.gov/1xTBxh4>.
- Article with good case management software options. <http://bit.ly/1t8Q02F>



## PREPARING SMALL BUSINESSES IN YOUR COMMUNITIES

- Most businesses are unprepared for a disaster. Those that falter impact the community.
- The reason why most businesses aren't prepared is because they believe a disaster won't happen to them. When they prepare, they cite lack of knowledge, expertise, time, and money as major obstacles. The chamber can assist businesses by offering them, or connecting them to, resources that address obstacles for preparedness.
- At the core, every business should have a business continuity plan (BCP). The more complex the business the more complex the plan. At its foundation, BCP plans contain the same basic elements: emergency contact list for employees, key contacts list, critical documents for decision making, list of critical equipment, and systems that may need to be replaced, etc.
- Offer workshops and lunch-and-learn sessions on business preparedness. There are business continuity associations, nonprofits, and professional organizations that can help.
- Contact your local U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) office to connect with local resources. This includes loan guarantees, counseling, and training. SBDCs and Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) chapters are also great resources.
- Send preparedness tips and tools to businesses multiple times a year. Disasters happen year-round and they will need regular reminders on how to take action.
- Participate and encourage businesses to take part in annual drills such as ShakeOut, America's PrepareAthon, and other national or local events that assist preparedness. Learn without the stress of a real disaster.
- Disaster Resistant Business Toolkit, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit has a tool to help small business plan and will give each chamber two free copies. Contact the Disaster Help Desk (1-888-692-4943) for more information.
- See Quick Guide—Business Preparedness for more information.

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Before a disaster, consider how you can assist your community's businesses. Work with a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) or other partners who counsel businesses. Combine with your existing resources to provide value added before and after disaster.

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## MEDIA STRATEGY

- The media can be a powerful way for chambers to relay business preparedness messaging.
- Need to work with the media? Develop a media relations plan with three parts: a target audience, a communications objective, and a message.
- Contact the media with stories and images. Consider what photo-ops may exist or how to tell a story visually, (e.g., what a business did to prepare or practicing in a drill like the ShakeOut.)
- Treat media as a partner in sharing your information. Build a relationship because the better you know each other now, the easier it is to respond to requests that meet everyone's objectives and ensure the correct messages reach businesses and the public.
- Invite reporters to attend preparedness events that you host.
- Be succinct in your communications. The clearer you are to reporters and in press releases, the better the chances are that message will be understood by the public and picked up by a news agency.
- Make one key point at a time in interviews. The media are looking for sound bites, so avoid sentences that could be edited or cut short and miss your point.
- Establish a media point of contact in your organization and plan for backups.
- Create a media contact list with names, cell numbers, and emails. Keep it current.

### Social Media Tips

- Create a Facebook page and a Twitter account for your chamber and update it regularly.
- Before a disaster, use preidentified hashtags (e.g., #prepare) to encourage preparedness or specific actions.
- Have the right person(s) focused on social media on a daily basis to connect with stories to help motivate preparedness.
- Hold Twitter town halls to acquaint the public with you as a source of information.
- Post streaming and recorded videos on preparedness topics such as planning or training.
- Verify all information (e.g., phone numbers) and use common sense to be respectful of entire community.
- Respond to issues immediately and professionally. Ignoring them on social media will only make it worse.

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Use anniversary events (e.g., historic flooding, a tornado, National Disaster Preparedness Month in September) to bring your members' attention to preparedness.

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## SETTING UP A CHAMBER FOUNDATION

- Consider the benefits of creating a chamber foundation. The process to get certified as a tax-exempt nonprofit can take about 18 months to complete and needs to be coordinated with a legal professional.
- A chamber foundation can be useful to set up a fund to support small businesses after disasters. You can promote the fund as maintaining jobs in the community. Often, people don't understand the importance of businesses until the jobs go away.
- If you do not have a 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation arm attached to your chamber, you can create a strategic partnership with an existing nonprofit to help. This process is easier if you work with someone that already has the mechanisms and procedures in place, such as a community foundation or economic development group. Having an already established nonprofit works well when emergencies occur because it reduces the start-up time to receive donations in times of need.



## OTHER RESOURCES

The following is a list of other resources available on our online guide:

- Financial/Federal Assistance
- Small Business Assistance
- Preparedness Resources (e.g. Build a Kit)
- Business Continuity Planning, Emergency Planning
- Emergency Drills, Training and Education
- Mental Health
- Mitigation and Risk Reduction
- Community Planning

For more information on these topics, visit [www.uschamberfoundation.org/ccf](http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/ccf).



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