

Chapter Twelve: Coordinating a Crisis Response Team

I. Introduction

A. Commitment

NOVA is committed to responding to any community-wide crisis, no matter what its source, if it receives a community-based invitation for service. It will attempt to raise the funds necessary to support a team's travel expenses. At times, these funds will be derived from membership dues, donations, or independent fundraising. At times, NOVA will request funding from governmental agencies such as the Department of Education or the Department of Justice. The Office for Victims of Crime has established a Community Crisis Response program to support travel expenses for volunteer teams who provide crisis assistance in the aftermath of crime and terrorism disasters. The Department of Education, in cooperation with the Department of Justice, has established funding for responding to school-related disasters. NOVA's commitment extends to all kinds of communities including employees of private, profit-making businesses. In order to sustain NOVA's continuing volunteer work, NOVA encourages communities to contribute what they can to defray team expenses with the understanding that no such contributions will be used to pay for salaries or personal expenses of team members.

There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstances permit. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results.

– Art Turock

B. Definitions

1. A NOVA Community Crisis Response Team: a trained group of NOVA volunteers who are available to respond within 24 hours to a call for assistance in the aftermath of a community-wide trauma-inducing event.
 - a. NOVA maintains a roster of active volunteers who have received NOVA's basic five day training and who have submitted to NOVA a statement of their ability and willingness to participate, their resumes or biographies, and a list of references. Volunteers may also be required to sign a contract with NOVA prior to participation, identifying NOVA's responsibilities and volunteers' responsibilities.
 - b. NOVA volunteers may serve on other crisis response teams but when they do, they may not identify themselves as NOVA volunteers unless NOVA is involved in the coordination of the community crisis response and authorizes their participation.
2. A community-wide trauma-inducing event: a community-wide traumatic event is one that causes life-threatening injury or death. Criteria to consider when determining whether the event may cause widespread trauma include the following non-exclusive attributes:
 - a. Incidents that occur within communities where people are strongly-affiliated with each other;
 - b. Incidents in which there are multiple eye (or other sensorial) witnesses;
 - c. Incidents in which the direct victims have a special significance to the community affected, as may happen with the assassination of a public figure or the killing of a child in a day-care center;
 - d. Incidents in which the community is subjected to exposure to carnage or misery;
 - e. Incidents which attract a great deal of media attention.

C. Examples of community crises include the devastating losses in “tornado alley,” the murders of two high school students in upstate New York, mass murder on the Long Island Railway, the robbery and murder of an Assistant District Attorney in New Jersey, the fires in Santa Monica, the floods in the Dakotas, and the derailment of the Amtrak train in Alabama.

II. Substance

A. Goals of a CRT:

1. To assist the local caregivers plan their immediate and longer-term activities in the aftermath of the catastrophe.
2. To give support to local caregivers in their efforts to respond to the catastrophe.
3. To train local caregivers in immediate crisis response and long-term stress reactions to trauma.
4. To help local caregivers by modeling and providing debriefing sessions to critical population groups.

B. Levels of service

1. Sending materials on disaster assistance, including handouts, training outlines, videos, and lists of resources in the area.
2. Providing telephone consultation, based on the following agreements with the community:
 - a. A local agency will agree to take the lead and will identify a contact person through whom NOVA can provide assistance. The contact person will keep NOVA advised of what is happening during the disaster response by telephoning twice each day with an update.
 - b. NOVA will be available 24 hours each day for reference and consultation.
 - c. NOVA will be available to do telephone debriefings of local staff and volunteers.
 - d. NOVA will write recommendations for future action after the immediate crisis response is finished.

3. On-scene response in support of local Crisis Response Teams, based on the following guidelines.
 - a. A local agency will be identified to organize the response and a lead contact person will be named.
 - b. The lead contact person must have received NOVA training and understand the NOVA model of crisis response intervention.
 - c. The local agency must have trained staff or volunteers capable of following the NOVA model of crisis response.
 - d. NOVA will provide 1 or 2 individuals from the National Crisis Response Team to go to the community. Their role will be limited to providing consultation, leadership and training assistance. They will not be involved in direct individual or group counseling interventions.
 - e. NOVA will provide the community with recommendations for use in long-range planning immediately after the representatives from the National Team have returned to their home jurisdictions.
4. On-scene crisis response team deployment. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to how this level of service is carried out.

C. Guidelines for selecting appropriate team members for deployment

1. Assess the type of catastrophe involved and the individual's experience with that kind of tragedy. Sometimes survivors of a similar disaster should not be used on a team because the crisis response effort may trigger unresolved reactions. On the other hand, some survivors of similar disasters can bring particular insight to the intervention as a result of their own experiences.
 - a. The following professional affiliations are represented on most CRTs (although one person can often credibly fill more than one role):
 - i. a law enforcement representative (patrol officer experience is preferred even if the

- representative is now a commanding officer)
 - ii. a psychologist or psychiatrist
 - iii. a victim service professional
 - iv. a member of the clergy
 - v. a member of a medical profession
 - vi. a child counselor or teacher
 - vii. a person experienced with media relations.
 - b. Attempt to match the team's attributes to the demographics of a community, including the racial or ethnic mix; the socio-economic background; the educational background; its rural or urban nature; languages; religious background, and so forth.
 - c. Take the personalities of the individuals into consideration. Ideally, CRT members are charismatic, flexible, diplomatic, patient team-players; have common sense; and are not egotistical or concerned about recognition for their contributions.
 - d. All team members will be trained community crisis intervenors, and will agree to follow NOVA's crisis response guidelines, debriefing guidelines, and training outlines.
 - e. All team members are volunteers for NOVA.
2. Roles of team members.
- a. Team leader: serves as the official liaison between the team and community; makes arrangements for team members at the site; serves as spokesperson for the team with the media when a separate media person is not assigned on the team; debriefs and cares for team members when necessary; writes and submits final report to NOVA on crisis response intervention. In most cases the team leader will be a mental health professional who has a Ph.D. or M.D.
 - b. Team manager: this person is usually a NOVA headquarters' staff member, paid or unpaid, or an experienced NOVA volunteer consultant who has served three or more times on NOVA

- CRTs. The manager handles all logistics; is liaison between the team and headquarters – calling headquarters at least twice each day while in the field; provides briefing papers and other support to the team leader; is responsible for supplies and NOVA materials; makes reports to the headquarters at the conclusion of the response.
 - c. Media liaison: this person handles all media inquiries; sets up media conferences when necessary; and serves as spokesperson for the team unless the team leader is designated to do so. The media liaison may be the same person as the team manager or the team leader.
 - d. Other team members: all team members must perform all assignments as given. They are expected to be able to provide a three-hour training seminar on the key issues of crisis response; do group or individual crisis intervention sessions (previously referred to as “debriefings”), either as group leader or group scribe, as necessary; and to understand the NOVA model of response for planning purposes. They are also expected to participate in practical assistance activities to the community, as assigned.
3. The length of stay in a community in response to a disaster of limited time duration will generally be approximately forty-eight hours. For disasters that span days, weeks or months, the length of stay may be longer. However, any team will probably stay no more than five days at a time. If a longer stay is necessary, a second team may relieve the first team.
 4. If local, regional or state teams exist, guidelines for when a NOVA team might be used are:

 - a. when local caregivers are in trauma
 - b. when an outside team may minimize political hostilities or regional animosities or facilitate logistical support

- c. when a national “presence” is wanted to convey support to the community or to handle issues with which the existing teams have little experience
 - d. NOVA will not respond to a disaster where a local team exists without the permission of the local team leadership unless there are clear reasons given by the local host for why the local team is inappropriate.
5. Behavior guidelines for team members at the site:
- a. All team members will go to the site of the disaster, if possible.
 - b. No team member will talk to the media without permission of the team leader.
 - c. No morgue humor will be used outside of the privacy of the team.
 - d. Team members should not make individual appointments without clearing them with the team leader.
 - e. Team members should remember that breakfast dinner and are normally spent together as a team, unless other commitments have been approved by the team leader.
 - f. Team members should avoid making derogatory remarks about any behavior or actions by local contacts, although problems should be noted and shared with other team members.
 - g. Team members should not make individual demands on local hosts such as asking for food, transportation, copies of materials or other support. Such requests should go through the team manager.
 - h. Physical comfort for team members is not a priority. This means that members may go without food, sleep, or exercise. Team members may be subject to weather extremes. Accommodations may not be great and the food may be second-rate. Complaints should not be made to local contacts and complaints within the team should be kept to a minimum, if possible.

- i. Team members are to act as representatives of NOVA and should participate as directed and take no actions except those authorized by the team leader or team manager.
- j. Team members must agree to abide by NOVA's victim assistance Code of Ethics appended to this chapter.
- k. Team members must follow all rules set by the team leader or team manager. The rules are designed to ensure the delivery of high-quality services to the community and, to the extent possible, the safety of the team members. Team members who violate established rules may be required to return home immediately. Extra expenses incurred to send a team member home before the completion of the crisis response will be the responsibility of the team member, and the team member's name will likely be removed from the National Team roster.
- l. Team members will be expected to be dressed professionally whenever possible. However, at times team members will need sturdy, casual clothes appropriate to the disaster site, the culture of the community or the weather. NOVA staff (or the team manager) will inform prospective team members of special needs (such as insect repellent), and will encourage team members to watch the weather reports on the news to determine what to bring. In general, the dress code for team members is:
 - men: suit coat or sport jacket, dress shoes, sturdy walking shoes, casual wear as needed.
 - women: dresses or suits, no outfits that are predominantly red, pink or all black, dress shoes, sturdy walking shoes (no open-toed shoes or sandals). No excessive jewelry. Slacks and casual wear as needed.
 - weather-related needs such as rainwear or overcoat.

- any symbols of a particular profession, for example, clerical collar or pins, law enforcement badge, nurse's pin, uniform jacket or the like. These may be worn at selected times, based on various populations and cultures.
- m. All team members are expected to contribute a written report to the team manager for inclusion in the final report. The report does not have to be typed; it does have to be legible.

D. "How-to's" of CRT response (see appended chart)

1. Outreach or response to cry for help:
 - a. Call: a victim assistance program, law enforcement agency, prosecutor, county commissioners, mayor, fire services, disaster response agency, etc., to identify a lead contact person.
 - b. Offer: identify self and NOVA. Explain briefly Crisis Response Team Project. Ask if he or she thinks they would like help.
 - c. Offer referrals to other sites that have received NOVA assistance in the past.
 - d. Contact 10-12 prospective team members. Find out who is willing to go on standby alert.
 - e. If lead local contact thinks a CRT is needed, put team members on standby for the next 72 hours. Ask them to pack bags and be prepared to go until further notice.
 - f. Begin travel printouts for prospective members.
2. If lead local contact thinks a CRT is needed, ask her or him to:
 - a. Clear it with local leadership; leadership might include:
 - police and sheriff departments
 - mental health agencies
 - emergency management services
 - mayor/chief executive of local jurisdiction
 - prosecutor, if the disaster involves a crime
 - governor or attorney general, if disaster is statewide or has implications for statewide response

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Participant's Notes

- state office on victim assistance
- victim assistance programs
- school administrator or superintendent
- other appropriate organizations
- b. Give NOVA a description of the community including:
 - demographics (ethnicity, socio-economic group, chief employment, education level, age, religious affiliation)
 - previous trauma history
 - political concerns
 - major local figures in the disaster response
- c. Locate a headquarters for the team at or near the site. Team headquarters should have access to copier, fax and several telephones.
- 3. NOVA Crisis Response Team Coordinator works with information from local contact person and makes final choice of team members.
- 4. Contact chosen team members and give them their travel information. Place order for prepaid plane (or train) tickets for team members, if necessary.
- 5. The NOVA CRT staff and volunteers should begin packing supplies as soon as it appears that NOVA might be responding.
- 6. The local contact person should be asked to collect the following supplies and services:
 - a. Flipcharts, markers, and masking tape for all training and group crisis intervention sessions.
 - b. Coffee and soft drinks for group crisis intervention sessions. Ashtrays and boxes of tissue will also be needed.
 - c. Depending on the nature of the crisis, the team may need walkie talkies or cellular telephones.
 - d. Local vehicles for use by the team. Often, these are provided by local governmental agencies which also provide a driver.
 - e. Identification of lodging for the team. While NOVA can pay for lodging, it often is unavailable in crisis and the local contact person may know alternatives.

7. The crisis should be monitored on the news from the time NOVA makes outreach until after NOVA returns. All national newspaper articles should be clipped and saved.
8. The local contact person should be asked to save all local newspaper articles as well.
9. The team members should be advised (or reminded) of the following issues:
 - a. Who is the team leader and who is the team manager
 - b. Behavior and dress guidelines
 - c. Any local political or organizational concerns that they might find in the community
 - d. All team members are restricted to *one* carry-on luggage bag.
 - e. NOVA in-house staff/volunteer is responsible for providing a written summary of the key issues, brief biographies of team members, and people that the team will meet at the site.
10. The strategy for responding to a crisis generally involves the following activities:
 - a. Team meeting at the first gathering point (team members should meet with each other prior to any other meetings). Meet local contact person and any other host representatives.
 - b. Team visit to the site
 - c. Planning meetings with the local contact person/people
 - d. Training sessions for all local caregivers
 - e. Group crisis intervention sessions for identified high risk groups – possible groups will include:
 - victims/survivors
 - emergency services personnel
 - rescue workers
 - law enforcement officers
 - fire fighters
 - local victim assistance helpers
 - children
 - elderly
 - f. One or more group crisis intervention sessions for the community as a whole

- g. Nightly group crisis intervention sessions for team members
 - h. Final group crisis intervention sessions for the local contact person and any local team members prior to leaving
 - i. Ad hoc meetings with local caregivers
 - j. Press conference(s) and press interviews
11. NOVA in-house staff undertakes the following follow-up procedures:
- a. Thank you letters to team members
 - b. Thank you letters to local hosts and helpers
 - c. Outreach (where possible) to victims/survivors who could not be served at the site
 - d. Touching base with local contact person at minimum:
 - within week after site visit
 - at months one, three, and six after site visit
 - one year after site visit

E. Guides for CRT response

On the pages following this text are three guides for managing a Crisis Response Team effort.

The first is a chart depicting the steps followed in making outreach and fielding a team. While no CRT service is ever as “tidy” as the chart suggests, it is important for NOVA headquarters staff and CRT team members to have this schemata in mind when responding to a disaster.

The second guide is the Code of Professional Ethics promulgated by the NOVA Board. While, normally, this Code is voluntarily adopted by individual victim assistance professionals, it is a mandatory standard for all CRT members.

The third guide is a detailed description of the roles team leaders and managers are expected to perform when serving on a CRT.

III. Conclusion

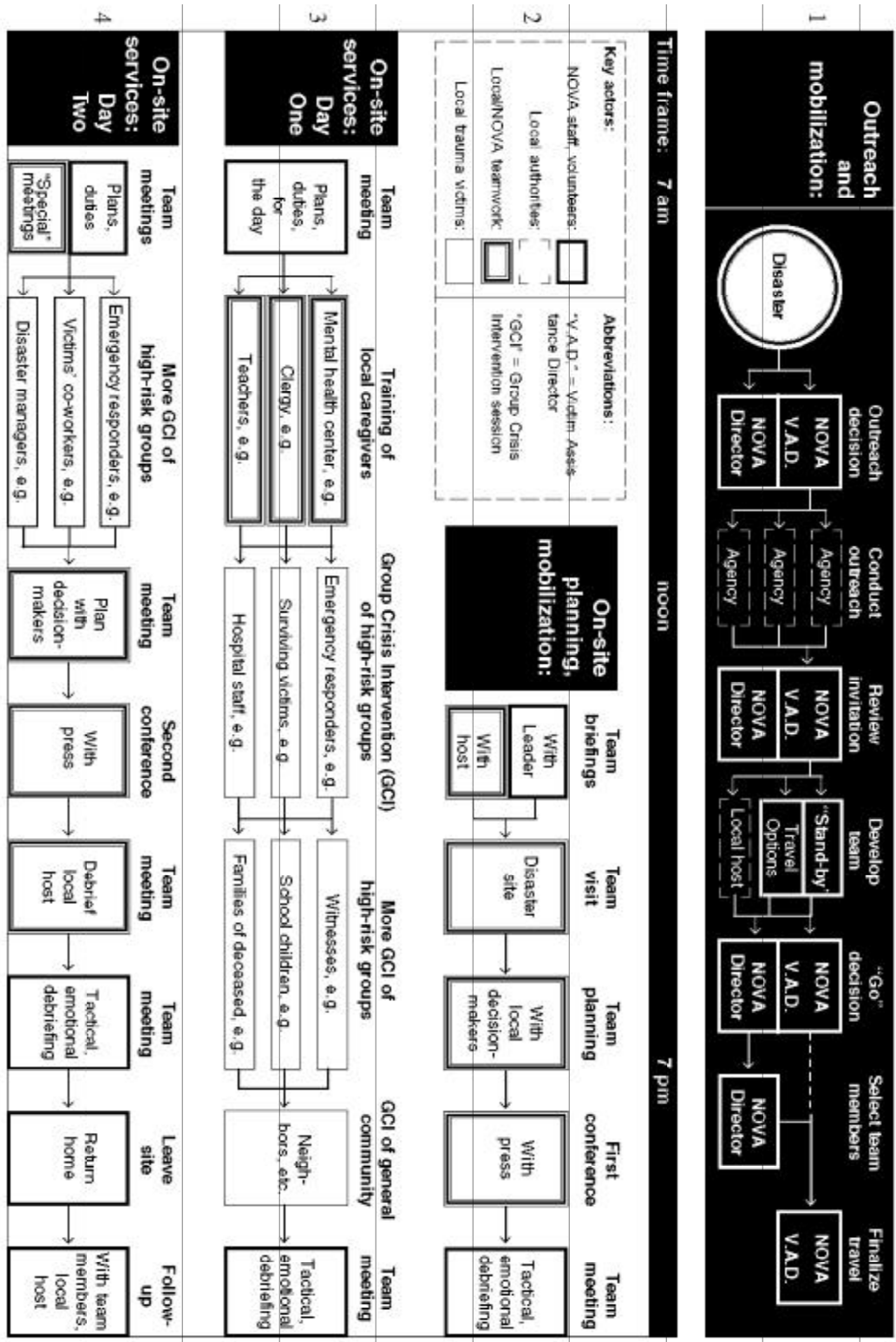
NOVA’s rules and guidelines for organizing and coordinating a Crisis Response Team are designed to reflect a step-by-step process for providing community crisis intervention. NOVA has found that if they are methodically followed they produce efficient and expeditious results. In

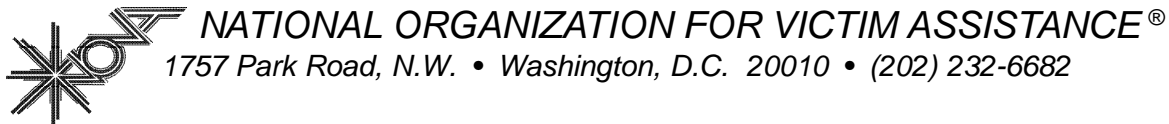
some cases, the circumstances of a disaster will make it imprudent to follow the process exactly; however, it is NOVA's expectation that team leaders, managers and members will abide by the rules and guidelines wherever possible. The implicit hierarchy and explicit planning of the organizational protocols helps to provide structure and calm in the midst of the chaos of catastrophe.

Organizing is what you do before you do something so that when you do it, it's not all mixed up.

– Christopher Robin in Milne, A., *Winnie the Pooh*, New York, NY:Dutton Children's Books, 1994.

The NOVA Community Crisis Response Team Process





Code of Professional Ethics for Victim Assistance Providers

Adopted by the NOVA Board of Directors, April 23, 1994

Victims of crime and the criminal justice system expect every Victim Assistance Provider, paid or volunteer, to act with integrity, to treat all victims and survivors of crime—their clients—with dignity and compassion, and to uphold principles of justice for accused and accuser alike. To these ends, this Code will govern the conduct of Victim Assistance Providers:

I. In relationships with every client, the Victim Assistance Provider shall:

1. Recognize the interests of the client as a primary responsibility.
2. Respect and protect the client's civil and legal rights.
3. Respect the client's rights to privacy and confidentiality, subject only to laws or regulations requiring disclosure of information to appropriate other sources.
4. Respond compassionately to each client — withholding opinion or judgment, and accepting the client's statement of events as it is told, whether or not an offender has been identified, arrested, convicted, or acquitted.
5. Provide services to every client without attributing blame, no matter what the client's conduct was at the time of the victimization or at another stage of the client's life.
6. Foster maximum self-determination on the part of the client.
7. Serve as a victim advocate when requested and, in that capacity, act on behalf of the client's stated needs without regard to personal convictions and within the social and legal parameters of the advocate's agency.
8. Provide each client with personalized services, working for the client's welfare without concern about personal gain.
9. Should one client's needs conflict with another's, act with regard to one client only after promptly referring the other to another qualified Victim Assistance Provider.
10. Observe the ethical imperative to have no sexual relations with clients, current or past, in recognition that to do so risks exploitation of the knowledge and trust derived from the professional relationship.
11. Make client referrals to other resources or services only in the client's best interest, avoiding any conflict of interest in the process.
12. Provide opportunities for colleague Victim Assistance Providers to seek appropriate services when traumatized by a criminal event or a client.

II. In relationships with colleagues, other professionals, and the public, *the Victim Assistance Provider shall:*

1. Conduct relationships with colleagues in such a way as to promote respect and improvement of service.
2. Make statements that are critical of colleagues only if they are verifiable and constructive in purpose.
3. Conduct relationships with allied professionals such that they are given equal respect and dignity as professionals in the victim assistance field.
4. Take steps to quell negative, insubstantial rumors about colleagues and allied professionals.
5. Share knowledge and encourage proficiency and excellence in victim assistance among colleagues and allied professionals, paid and volunteer.
6. Provide professional support, guidance, and assistance to Victim Assistance Providers who are new to the field in order to promote consistent quality and professionalism in victim assistance.
7. Seek to ensure that volunteers in victim assistance have access to the training, supervision, resources, and support required in their efforts to assist clients.
8. Act to promote crime and violence prevention as a public service and an adjunct to victim assistance.
9. Respect laws of one's state and country while working to change those that may be unjust or discriminatory.

III. In her or his professional conduct, *the Victim Assistance Provider shall:*

1. Maintain high personal and professional standards in the capacity of a service provider and advocate for clients.
2. Seek and maintain proficiency in the delivery of services to clients.
3. Not discriminate against any victim, employee, colleague, allied professional, or member of the public on the basis of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, race, national origin, religious belief, or sexual orientation.
4. Not reveal the name or other identifying information about client to the public without clear permission or legal requirements to do so.
5. Clearly distinguish in public statements one's personal views from positions adopted by organizations for which he or she works or is a member.
6. Not use her or his official position to secure gifts, monetary rewards, or special privileges or advantages.
7. Report to competent authorities the conduct of any colleague or allied professional that constitutes mistreatment of a client or that brings the profession into disrepute.
8. Report to competent authorities any conflict of interest that prevents oneself or a colleague from being able to provide competent services to a client, or to work cooperatively with colleagues or allied professionals, or to be impartial in the treatment of any client.

IV. In his or her responsibility to any other profession, *the Victim Assistance Provider will be bound by the ethical standards of the allied profession of which she or he is a member.*



Duties of a Crisis Response Team Leader

1. Assemble and meet with the team members as soon as possible upon arrival.

2. Brief team members on details of the disaster and distribute briefing packets, if available. Make a list of any team concerns or ideas that might be useful in the planning of the response.

3. Meet with the local host to get update on disaster details, logistical arrangements for team transportation and housing arrangements, and details on site visit or any scheduled meetings.

4. Lead the team on a visit to the site of the disaster, when possible.

5. Attend planning meeting with local host or planning committee to outline plans for team activities for the duration of the stay. The leader should be the primary spokesperson for NOVA at this meeting. To the extent possible, other team members should raise questions or contribute comments through the team leader. The team leader should be thoroughly familiar with the goals of a NOVA CRT and the standard protocols of implementation.

6. Based on the plan, the team leader should make assignments to team members concerning their duties. Such assignments should include designating:

- a media manager to handle media requests and to arrange for press conferences should the community request such assistance.
- specific team members for each segment of each training session for caregivers. It is desirable to include multiple team members in training sessions to better acquaint the community with team member skills. The standard three-hour training has four separable components. Ideally, a different team member would be assigned for each segment.
- group crisis intervention teams of two for each group session, identifying in each team who is to be the facilitator and who is to be the scribe.

- specific team members, according to their expertise, to offer assistance to and meet with representatives of various population groups that may benefit from services even if they were not represented at the planning meeting.
 - specific team members to work with individual victims or surviving families, if needed.
 - specific team members to assist with practical needs of the local host or community, as needed.
6. Serve as the spokesperson with any media should the community request NOVA involvement with the media.
 7. Meet with any local officials, upon request, to provide them with information on team plans and feedback on execution of those plans.
 8. Supervise and monitor team members behavior and give feedback on compliance with NOVA guidelines and ethics.
 9. Meet with team members each evening to discuss the day's events and activities and to provide a team GCI session addressing trauma reactions. During the team GCI, the leader should serve as the facilitator but should also begin the session by discussing his or her own reactions first to ensure that other team members feel comfortable in the session.
 10. Encourage team cooperation and mutual support. The leader should look for opportunities for the team to enjoy laughter or fun together to keep spirits high.
 11. Provide leadership through such activities as introducing team members at training sessions and participating in training segments with key caregiving populations or serving as facilitator for community group crisis intervention sessions, when possible.
 12. Serve as consultant to team members when problems arise in trainings or group crisis intervention sessions.
 13. Conduct final group crisis intervention with local host.
 14. Serve as NOVA spokesperson and submit any team recommendations at final planning meeting prior to leaving the community.
 15. Write and submit final report to NOVA following the crisis response intervention.

Duties of a Crisis Response Team Manager

1. Maintain “black box” during site stay.
2. Provide team leader with briefing papers prepared by NOVA, if available.
3. Maintain log of all flight arrangements for team members and ensuring that they are picked up from the airport or have alternate transportation to site, if needed.
4. Arrange for transportation and lodging arrangements, if local host needs assistance or alternatives to NOVA arrangements are needed.
5. Identify a headquarters for the team and ensure that the team has access to a copier, fax, and several telephones.
6. Keep log and schedule of team assignments made by team leader, including when team members are due at assignments and when they will return; log all completed assignments by noting what kind of group was trained or counseled, how many were present, and an estimate of any one-on-one counseling during the day.
7. Work with local host to arrange for any logistics necessary for training sessions or group crisis intervention sessions. This includes assisting with implementing plans for disseminating information to the community for community crisis intervention sessions.
8. Provide training materials, hand-outs or supplies to team members, as needed.
9. Work with media manager to set up any press conferences.
10. Provide advice to team leader, upon request of the leader or the NOVA headquarters. Such advice should be given discretely and should not undermine the leader's authority with the community or other team members.
11. Arrange for team meals at designated time determined by team leader.
12. Report to NOVA headquarters at least twice each day or any time when additional direction or information is needed.
13. Keep file of all local press coverage of the disaster and disaster related materials to be included in final NOVA report.

Community Crisis Response Team Training Manual: Second Edition

Participant's Notes

14. Keep file of all local contacts who should receive letters or certificates of appreciation upon the team's return.

15. Ensure that all team members have transportation arrangements to return home.

16. Write and submit final report to NOVA headquarters upon team return.

17. Be prepared to do any service required of other team members, upon assignment, but management duties should take priority over other activities.