

THE RURAL TEXAN

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OFFICE OF RURAL COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

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At Issue: Accessing Disaster Relief Funds

Damage to infrastructure, homes and businesses can linger long after storms clear, impeding daily life and halting economic progress. When it's first-come, first-served, accessing scarce disaster relief funds and mustering matching funds depends on the community's ability to conduct a fast and accurate initial damage assessment, using their emergency management plan as a guide.

First-Come, First-Served for Disaster Relief Funds Emergency Management Plan Critical to Fast Initial Damage Assessment

By Charlie S. Stone, ORCA Executive Director

Because of very limited funding, the disaster relief process is often a race to the pot of gold, with the most assistance going to the cities and counties whose applications reach the end of the rainbow first.

To beat the rush to DR funds, communities must conduct an initial damage assessment before state and federal agencies arrive for a formal damage assessment. Often underestimated, this initial damage assessment, performed by a team of community members, is perhaps the most important step in the application process and should be conducted with accuracy and without delay.

Most rural communities know that ORCA is prepared to award grants (first-come, first-served) of up to \$350,000 as funds of last resort or as matching funds to repair infrastructure.

The agency is also able to provide technical support by attending damage assessments, helping communities determine beneficiaries and answering other questions to help communities apply for disaster relief.

However, communities should not lose sight of the key to a fast and accurate initial

damage assessment: their own emergency management plan. Using their emergency management plan as a guide, communities should conduct their own survey of homes, businesses and infrastructure as soon as possible after the disaster event.

“Communities should not lose sight of the key to a fast and accurate initial damage assessment: their own emergency management plan.”

Community members designated in the emergency management plan as part of a stand-by team should be ready to conduct the initial assessment immediately following an event, saving the community valuable time often wasted assembling a team.

The stand-by team should include a representative from the county and members of the community who are able to quantify damages and estimate losses.

City managers, tax assessors, building inspectors, council members, county and city engineers are examples of individuals

who may be able to best perform this function. It is also helpful to designate two team members to serve as liaisons to state and federal agencies.

During their assessment, the stand-by team should take photos and prepare two maps showing affected areas, indicating whether the damages are to infrastructure, houses or businesses.

To expedite the process communities should document the assessment with the Public Property Site Assessment Worksheet (DEM-25), available from GDEM at www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/pages/index.htm. The stand-by team should also determine, as accurately as possible, the percent of insurance coverage for damaged homes and businesses.

Finally, the community should be ready to have available two large-capacity vehicles for use during the damage assessment by state and federal agencies.

Within 30 days after the event, the stand-by team that performed the initial damage assessment should submit a disaster summary outline to the Governor's Division of Emergency Management (GDEM). And as always, the sooner the better.

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ORCA Executive Committee

“ORCA is one of the few sources of disaster relief grants in Texas, and every one of those dollars is earmarked for relief aid in rural communities only. This assistance is vital to successful recovery efforts in rural communities who have tapped out their funding options from other resources.”

*Dr. Wallace Klussmann
Chair, ORCA Executive Committee*

“ORCA has provided more than \$1.7 million in disaster relief funds to rural communities damaged by floods in fall 2006 and spring 2007, and is already providing technical assistance to help many rural communities recover from this disaster. It's what the agency was created to do.”

*Charles S. (Charlie) Stone
ORCA Executive Director*

Marble Falls: Emergency Management Plan Speeds Disaster Recovery

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

Seven days after they began, local emergency response teams in Marble Falls completed their assessment of damages and concluded that the floods of July 2007 had dealt a serious blow to the community's infrastructure.

Although the disaster caused several thousand dollars in damages, Ralph Hendricks, Fire Chief and emergency management coordinator of Marble Falls, was upbeat about the community's ability to recover.

“Things are going very well for the magnitude of this disaster,” said Hendricks. “We put the emergency management plan into operation quickly because we saw it would be a large-scale event. We called in neighboring departments and cities, and they were generous with time and equipment.”

Marble Falls relies on an emergency management plan to guide its response during disasters, saving what Hendricks calls “vital hours” in the recovery process.

These “vital hours” shave days and possibly months from the total recovery time, meaning that businesses can open and employees can return to work sooner rather than later.

Richards said that the plan helped his team respond quickly to the community's safety and shelter needs. It also jump-started the recovery process because numerous critical decisions, such as the location of an incident command post and the appointment of specific people to handle key tasks, were established well in advance of the flooding.

The emergency response team had completed their initial assessment of damage to the community and was well prepared to facilitate the official damage assessment when state and federal agencies arrived. Staff from ORCA, the Governor's Division of Emergency Management (GDEM), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and FEMA were in Marble Falls on June 29 and July 5, 2007 to provide technical assistance in preparing damage assessment reports required by GDEM.

“Everyone (in Marble Falls) was up to speed on where they needed to be,” said Margaret Hardin of Langford Community Management Services, a consulting firm specializing in Community Development Block Grant funds. “Disaster relief funds are first-come first-serve so the community must get their application submitted in a timely manner or the funds may not be available.



Representatives from NRCS and the City of Marble Falls examine damages to the bridge on Pecan Valley Drive in Marble Falls. Photo by Margaret Hardin, Langford Community Management Services.

Resource Guide: Who's Who in Disaster Relief

GDEM, ORCA, FEMA, Other State Agencies, and the Damage Assessment Team

A perplexing alphabet soup of state and federal agencies oversees the disaster relief process; knowing who's who can help rural communities navigate the road to recovery.

GDEM

The Governor's Division of Emergency Management (GDEM) is charged with carrying out a comprehensive all-hazard emergency management program for the State and for assisting cities, counties, and state agencies in planning and implementing their emergency management programs.

A comprehensive emergency management program includes pre and post-disaster mitigation of known hazards to reduce their impact; preparedness activities, such as emergency planning, training, and exercises; provisions for effective response to emergency situations; and recovery programs for major disasters. Chapter 418 of the Texas Government Code lays out an extensive set of specific responsibilities assigned to the Division.

When disasters occur of a magnitude that state and federal assistance might be needed, the Recovery Section of GDEM coordinates damage surveys with local and federal agencies, prepares disaster declaration requests for the Governor's signature, and deploys staff to the affected area to coordinate the overall recovery process.

For major disasters, state and federal recovery staffs are collocated in a Joint Field Office. The GDEM Recovery staff includes specialists who carry out disaster recovery programs for individual disaster victims and families (individual assistance) and aid local governments and public entities, such as school districts and hospitals, (public

assistance) with programs to repair or reconstruct facilities that were damaged or destroyed.

Source: Governor's Division of Emergency Management

ORCA

ORCA is solely dedicated to rural Texas. The agency's Disaster Relief Fund is available to communities and counties officially declared disaster areas by either the Governor of the State of Texas or the President of the United States.

(TXDOT) assesses damages to infrastructure, performs damage mitigation and emergency repair.

The Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) provides teams of insurance specialists to the Mobile DRCs (disaster recovery centers) to assist insurance consumers.

The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) assists with processing Disaster Grants.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

so that deceased animals' owners can be identified.

Source: Governor's Division of Emergency Management

FEMA

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) evaluates requests for disaster declarations from the governor and recommends action to the White House based on the disaster, the local community and the state's ability to recover; Federal resources may be mobilized through for search and rescue, electrical power, food, water, shelter and other basic human needs.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency

The Damage Assessment Team

GDEM leads the Damage Assessment Team. Accompanying GDEM, may be officials from FEMA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS), the Texas Department of Public Safety (TxDOT) staff members from ORCA and other state and federal officials. The community may also invite contract consultants such as grant writers, to participate in the assessment.

The Damage Assessment Team meets with county officials to discuss the status of communities following the disaster, then breaks up into two groups (one for infrastructure and one for homes and businesses) to discuss losses with local representatives.

Site surveys follow, beginning with the most damaged areas and concluding with the least damaged areas. Teams reconvene to review their findings and discuss the declaration process.

Following the damage assessment, if appropriate, the Governor issues a disaster declaration for affected counties and sends a letter to the President requesting federal assistance.

Disaster Relief Information Online

GDEM provides a comprehensive emergency management and disaster relief resource online at www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/pages/index.htm. From this page communities may access the following information:

Current Declared Disasters: www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/pages/dr_current_disasters.htm

Damage Assessment Preparation: ftp://ftp.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/recovery/damage_assessment_prep.pdf

Evacuation Planning for Texans with Disabilities: <ftp://ftp.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/publicinfo/evacspeccneeds.pdf>

Hazard Mitigation: www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/pages/hazardmitigation.htm

Map of Impacted Counties: www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/pages/2007_flood_map_aug_03.pdf

PPA Worksheet and FEMA Forms: www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/pages/disasterrecovery.htm

Situation Reports: www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/sitrepindex.htm

A maximum of \$350,000 per award is available on a first-come, first-served basis for infrastructure repair and match funds. The agency also provides technical assistance to rural communities as they assess damages and prepare applications for disaster relief, including assistance with demographic assessments.

The Disaster Relief Fund is one of ORCA's Community Development Block Grant programs, which provide financial assistance to cities under 50,000 in population and counties under 200,000 in population.

Other State Agencies

The Texas Department of Transportation

(TPWD) provides search and recovery operations.

The Texas Commission on Environment Quality (TCEQ) inspects dams and provides assistance and guidance with debris management and emergency outdoor burning, dam safety, and public water supply/waste water facility assessments. The Strike Team and emergency response staff make preparations to respond to additional flooding if needed.

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) works with personnel from the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association (TSCRA) to obtain information

ORCA Grants Clearinghouse Online at www.orca.state.tx.us

By David Nobles, ORCA

Featured Grant: Presbyterian Hunger Program

Presbyterian Church - USA awards competitive grants to nonprofit organizations, PC(USA) congregations, and others who devote a significant part of their work to address the root causes of hunger or feed and house an especially underserved population.

Award Amount
\$500 - \$15,000

The Presbyterian Hunger program provides grants in five areas:

- 1) Direct Food Relief
- 2) Development Assistance
- 3) Influencing Public Policy
- 4) Life-style Integrity
- 5) Education and Interpretation

Application Deadline
Postmarked by July 15th for December awards.
Postmarked by December 15th for March awards.

Contact Information
www.pcusa.org/hunger/
Georgetta Poyntz
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202
888.726.7228 x5832
gpoyntz@ctr.pcusa.org

Additional Information

1. Direct Relief: PHP supports programs which ensure that food is available to those in need while also working on longer-term solutions. PHP grants support food pantries and soup kitchens, communal feeding programs and homeless feeding programs.

2. Development Assistance: PHP encourages and supports land ownership by the poor, appropriate agricultural technology, rural community development, cooperative economic development, effective soil conservation, water resource development, equitable food distribution, community organizing, and nutrition education. PHP grants support food cooperatives, job training, agricultural development, micro enterprise and micro credit, community organizing, nutrition education and water projects.

3. Influencing Public Policy: PHP recognizes that Presbyterians must stand for justice in those arenas where the voices of the poor are not heard. It supports organizations and coalitions which advocate for public policies that provide food for poor and hungry people and empower their self-development. PHP grants and partnerships support advocacy for child nutrition programs, welfare reform that provides real opportunity, foreign aid directed toward the needs of the poor, sustainable agricultural practices and the survival of family farms, trade policies which protect the most vulnerable and debt relief for the poorest nations.

4. Lifestyle Integrity. In this world where some go hungry because other consume too much, PHP encourages families, church groups, and institutions to evaluate their own needs and develop new ways of being more caring and sharing of the world's resources in obedience to the Gospel. PHP provides resources for simpler lifestyles, simpler observance of Christmas, spiritual development and sharing resources.

5. Education and Interpretation. PHP provides funding and staff support for a national network of Hunger Action Enablers, the development of Bible study resources, educational resources for congregations, programs educating the public on the reality of hunger and education and action resources for youth.



Where rural Texas comes first.

THE RURAL TEXAN

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The Rural Texan is a free publication that covers emerging rural economic development issues and features original stories, rural case studies, interviews with experts and related funding opportunities.

To subscribe, call ORCA
at 800-544-2042 or email
Julie V. Kelly, Editor,
at orca@orca.state.tx.us.

Braggin' Rights

Does your rural community have an economic development success story to share? ORCA would like to feature your story in *The Rural Texan*.

Please email a brief description of your story to orca@orca.state.tx.us. Include "success story" in the subject line.

As the state agency dedicated solely to rural Texas, ORCA makes the broad resources of state government more accessible to rural communities.

The agency ensures a continuing focus on rural issues, monitors governmental actions affecting rural Texas, researches problems and recommends solutions, and is a coordinator and provider of rural-focused state and federal resources.

ORCA does not endorse any product or service discussed in this newsletter. Such discussions are provided to readers for information only.

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ORCA's Mission:

"To assist rural Texans who seek to enhance their quality of life by facilitating, with integrity, the use of the resources of our state so that sustained economic growth will enrich the rural Texas experience for the benefit of all."