



NORTH AMERICAN
HUMANITARIAN
RESPONSE SUMMIT



NORTH AMERICAN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE SUMMIT (NAHRS) PROJECT

UNITED STATES PREPARATORY MEETING REPORT

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PREPARED BY GLOBAL EMERGENCY GROUP

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1. Introduction

There exist many different efforts (laws, legal authorities, compacts, memoranda of understanding, projects) related to strengthening cross border support during crises in North America. However, there is limited comprehensive understanding of these various efforts beyond the entities directly involved. This siloed approach across the three countries (Canada, Mexico and the United States), combined with significant bureaucratic barriers, will impede response efforts during a potential catastrophic disaster response when the rapid flow of humanitarian assistance (professional personnel, equipment and supplies) is required to save lives and reduce suffering.

The North American Humanitarian Response Summit (NAHRS) project represents a unique effort to improve the effectiveness of cross-border response to a potential catastrophic disaster in North America. NAHRS is implemented by the American Red Cross in partnership with the Canadian Red Cross and Mexican Red Cross, and with the participation of the countries' respective federal, state and provincial government entities involved in disaster response. Its objectives include:

- Identifying barriers and relevant work completed to date;
- Working to improve communication, coordination, collaboration and diplomatic relations and the exchange of ideas amongst all major parties involved; and
- Seeking to identify clear and quantifiable next steps to prepare for a major catastrophic response.

The NAHRS project was initiated on September 26th-27th, 2017 with a convening meeting at the American Red Cross National Headquarters in Washington, DC for NAHRS stakeholders from Canada, Mexico and the United States (US). The meeting socialized the project's goals and laid the foundation for the remainder of the effort. After the convening meeting, preparatory meetings were held to focus on country-specific barriers, gaps and solutions to cross border coordination and support during catastrophic disaster responses. The US preparatory meeting took place from January 17th-18th in Tucson, Arizona. In this meeting, participants from the American Red Cross and the US Government gathered to pinpoint opportunities and barriers related to cross-border response to a catastrophic disaster in the US.

2. Meeting Methodology

The US preparatory meeting centered around an interactive Table Top Exercise (TTX), in which facilitators presented a catastrophic disaster scenario to engage participants to consider the triggers, requirements and protocols for accepting international aid from North American partners. The disaster scenario used was a 'Cascadia Subduction Zone (CSZ) Earthquake and Tsunami Scenario,' in which a 9.6 magnitude earthquake along the CSZ, centered approximately 95 miles west of Eugene, Oregon impacts the west coast of the US. In this TTX, the earthquake creates a massive tsunami with an inundation zone of 450 miles, affecting areas of Oregon, Washington and California. The event immediately kills 200,000 people and directly affects another 8 million, effectively overwhelming US response systems and forcing the US Government and other response agencies to consider the mechanisms for accepting international aid from North American neighbors.

The use of an extreme event helped participants suspend disbelief and imagine a situation in which national response capacities would be completely overwhelmed. Such an event would have significant and devastating economic and social impacts, presenting difficult moral dilemmas related to the prioritization of needs. This approach provided a frame for ensuing plenary and group discussions.

The TTX was presented in four distinct sessions to address NAHRS topics. Participants were divided into table groups, where they collaborated to work through TTX injects using an interactive online platform developed by Global Emergency Group (GEG) in partnership with the Urban Resilience Platform (URP). Facilitators supported each group as they worked through questions related to NAHRS key topic areas, making note of central challenges and themes presented across groups. The result of the US Preparatory Meeting was a series of defined challenges, solutions and next steps for improving the coordination of international response during catastrophic disasters in North America.

3. Key Topics

The NAHRS topic areas covered during the US Preparatory Meeting were:

1. Determination of national requirements and triggers for accepting and facilitating international support
2. Cross border movement of professional response personnel and their equipment
3. Cross border movement of humanitarian supplies and tools
4. Licensure requirements for professional response personnel
5. Migration issues related to the movement of people from one country to another due to a disaster (either due to the threat of a disaster or following the occurrence of a disaster)

During discussions, the participants in the US Preparatory Meeting added another topic - Accountability to Affected persons. Each of these topic areas was covered in-depth during the TTX. The conversations and insights from these sessions supported development of a series of challenges and solutions.

3.1 Determination of National Requirements and Triggers for Requesting, Accepting and Facilitating International Support

During this session, participants were asked to use the scenario to answer the following questions:

1. What are the existing triggers in place for requesting international assistance from Canada and Mexico? What are the challenges in applying these triggers? What solutions are there to address these challenges?
2. Should the United States request assistance from Canada and Mexico in support of response and recovery efforts?
3. What types and quantities of assistance that can be mobilized from Canada and Mexico?
4. What are the likely challenges related to mobilizing assistance on the scale of what's needed?

The scenario's effect on the US forced participants to consider pre-existing policies that dictate response activities and triggers for requesting international assistance, as well as what aid should be requested from which international stakeholders. Participants agreed that the primary reason for requesting international aid in a catastrophic disaster would be the stretching of domestic

response capacity, due to factors such as the loss of infrastructure and an exceptional number of fatalities. Challenges identified in accepting international aid included developing an understanding of the needs in such a large scale disaster and the coordination and integration of foreign assets with state, local and federal government entities.

In the US, the International Assistance System (IAS) Concept of Operations dictates acceptance of international aid at the federal level. The IAS is a 'detailed plan for processing offers, submitting requests, and accepting foreign offers of assistance (commodities or personnel) to support response and relief efforts in the United States¹, and applies only to formal transactions between the US Government (USG) and foreign governments/international organizations. This does not include foreign offers to state, local, or tribal governments.

Solutions proposed for solving coordination issues in a catastrophic disaster response included:

- Creating a national clearing house and procedures to handle offers of assistance in collaboration with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the United Nations (UN)
- Holding Emergency Support Functions (ESF) responsible for planning and developing a prioritized list of international assistance requirements and requests under the National Response Framework (NRF)

3.2 Cross Border Movement of Professional Response Personnel and their Equipment and Licensure issues

As aid begins to arrive from Canada and Mexico to support US response to the CSZ disaster, participants had to consider strategic and operational implications of receiving aid from North American neighbors. During this session, participants were asked to use the scenario to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges likely to arise related to this incoming international assistance?
2. What are the new solutions or ways of working that could address these challenges?

Challenges identified included the lack of clarity and understanding regarding processes for getting equipment and supplies across borders during a catastrophic disaster, which highlighted the need for training on current international response processes and mechanisms already in place. Another challenge was the issue of bringing foreign first responders into the US. The policies, processes and mechanisms for obtaining visas for professional response personnel are not widely understood. Furthermore, there are no clear methods at the state or federal level for accepting licensure and credentialing for foreign professional response personnel (i.e. medical personnel, engineers, drivers, electrical workers).

Proposed solutions included:

- Developing templates (or promulgate existing templates) for use by response organizations to assist states and response organizations in facilitating border crossings and interactions with CBP, thus improving logistical efficiency of cross-border aid
- Creating licensing and credentialing standards and baselines for states to leverage during a catastrophe. These standards or baselines could include boiler plate language for use by governors
- Investigating models from other nations for the use regarding the integration of foreign medical personnel

¹ file:///Users/Student/Downloads/787960.pdf

- Researching current international liability and insurance coverage schemes (i.e. the UNDAC system and World Bank risk pools) to determine how liability and insurance coverage could work for international responders
- Developing US support for the World Health Organization's (WHO) efforts to develop Emergency Medical Teams. These teams would be pre-approved by consenting nations, and could deploy immediately in the case of a catastrophic emergency
- Using ESF 6 and the American Red Cross to build a framework to handle the influx of international NGO support

3.3 Cross Border Movement of Humanitarian Supplies, Equipment, and Tools

The next session continued to test the US systems for accepting international aid by simulating receipt of large quantities of diverse aid supplies at US borders and ports; a large number of which were to support the large numbers of spontaneous internally-displaced peoples' (IDP) camps being set up across the US western seaboard. During this session, participants were asked to use the scenario to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges likely to arise related to this incoming international supplies, equipment and tools?
2. What are the new solutions or ways of working that could address these challenges?

One of the consistent challenges emerging from this session was that US standards regarding food, medicine, and other regulated items might impede responders' ability to meet the humanitarian need with international aid. Another challenge to response in the CSZ disaster scenario was US domestic responders' relative limited experience with large scale sheltering solutions.

The most popular solution proposed across working groups was to build cohesive standards for equipment and supplies, including pre-approved lists of relief goods that could be readily approved at border crossings. Several participants also encouraged the US to research the international response community's systems and mechanism to determine practices that could benefit North America during a catastrophic event (i.e. cash transfers and temporary protection status). Participants also proposed that the American Red Cross could reach out through ESF 6 to United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), IFRC and other international partners to bring in the technical expertise required for IDP camp set up, management, and sustainment.

3.4 Migration Issues related to the Movement of People from One Country to Another Due to the Catastrophic Disaster

The final TTX session was designed to have participants consider issues concerning migration due to a catastrophic disaster. The scenario presented two situations for working groups to discuss: a medical airlift of 6,000 dialysis patients, and the undocumented migration of 10,000 US citizens seeking asylum across the Canadian border. During this session, participants were asked to use the scenario to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges likely to arise related to this large movement of people?
2. What are the new solutions or ways of working that could address these challenges?

There are a number of innate challenges related to migration of US populations in the context of a catastrophic disaster scenario. Participants recognized the limited current capacity to process a

mass influx of people at the border in terms of screening for visa issues, screening for medical issues, and provision for specialized needs. Repatriation was also seen as a challenge especially if disaster impacted populations move across borders without identification. This is exacerbated by the fact that a majority of Americans do not have passports, Lack of viable transportation options to get patients in need of medical care to international hospitals was also identified as a challenge.

Participants agreed that the first step to take in overcoming these challenges was to prevent as much cross-border movement as possible. Operational efforts to keep populations in country could be supplemented by a public information campaign before and after the catastrophe to encourage people not to cross international borders. Other solutions included:

- Exhausting the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) and state-to-state support capacity before considering international solutions
- Conducting an analysis of current domestic catastrophic plans and planning efforts
- Implementing paper-based registration processes for people at borders and in camps
- Using the IAS example to facilitate a global conversation and develop a more robust global document to assist in cross border issues during catastrophic response

3.5 Other Key Topics Discussed During TTX Sessions

One of the most consistent comments made across working groups concerning existing US catastrophic disaster response systems was the need to increase accountability to affected people, especially vulnerable populations. Included in “Accountability to Affected Persons” were the challenges in dealing with remains.

Participant solutions included:

- Setting up task forces and working groups, including White House representatives and stakeholders with the proper state/federal authority, to address the variety of issues:
 - Visas
 - Medical licensure
 - Importing assets
 - Offers
 - Water & sanitation
 - Communications (FCC)
 - Power
 - Others, as needed
- Initiating a forum to bring together governors and ministers to address state-specific issues related to catastrophic disaster response
- Sensitizing local and state elected officials to catastrophic disaster response requirements, planning, and how authorities and laws may need to change to support their constituencies
- Establishing a task force with the authority to develop and implement policy and procedures on the fly during catastrophic response
- Exploring the potential for the Emergency Management Consultative Group (EMCG) to take on a coordination role in a cross-border response scenario

4. Key Findings and Conclusions

During the US Preparatory Meeting, facilitators captured the various challenges and solution recommendations from the discussions. Participants were asked to first revise the list of challenges and then determine if they agreed or disagreed with the resulting list. The same was done with the

solution recommendations. Participants then voted individually on which solutions they believed to be the most important recommendations to put forward to the broader NAHRS stakeholders at the NAHRS Summit Meeting in March 2018. The results from this process are presented below.

Challenges

The challenges with highest levels of agreement, in order, include:

1. Planning for vulnerable populations in a catastrophic disaster should be more robust
2. Standards regarding food, medicine and other regulated items may impede the ability to meet the humanitarian need
3. Ability to manage remains may not be robust enough to handle the scale of deaths in a catastrophic disaster
4. Ability to process a mass influx at the border; screen for medical issues (i.e. infectious diseases); visas issues; specialized needs, etc. may be limited
5. US domestic response does not have enough sheltering solutions or expertise to meet the needs of a catastrophic disaster
6. The policies, processes and mechanisms for bringing professional response personnel and their equipment into the US are not widely understood
7. There are limited systems and processes for transporting people with medical needs across international borders
8. There will be non-US citizens in the affected zone. Those who lack immigration status would not be able to access federal support
9. There will be tension related to international protection issues for disaster affected people from an NGO perspective as compared to the federal perspective related to immigration
10. There is no method to repatriate citizens if there is a mass migration across borders, especially when people may not have identification

Solutions

The recommended solutions receiving the highest numbers of votes, in order, include:

1. Develop licensing and credentialing standards/baselines to leverage during catastrophic disaster to address licensure and credentialing concerns. Include boiler plate language
2. Leverage the current IAS to facilitate a global conversation to develop a more robust global document to address cross-border issues during catastrophic disasters
3. Develop a new working group, or extend existing mechanisms, to focus on both policy (NCS) and operational level (UAC) cross-border coordination that can establish policy 'on the fly'
4. Reconstitute the U.S. – Mexico Border Governors Conference (southern border) and a similar mechanism for northern border. Alternatively, accomplish this by going through an existing organization to which governors already belong

5. Build cohesive standards for equipment and supplies, and develop pre-approved lists of relief supplies/equipment that could be readily approved at the border
6. The American Red Cross, through ESF-6, can reach out to UNHCR, IOM and other international partners to bring in technical expertise require for IDP camp set-up, management and sustainment

Results from the NAHRS US Preparatory Meeting will be shared with attendees of the North American Humanitarian Response Summit in Washington, DC from March 14-15, 2018.