

Sustainable Disaster Recovery Utilizing A Program Management Approach

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For many people world-wide January 2010 will be most remembered for the tremendous damage and loss of human life that resulted from the earthquake in Haiti. This colossal disaster has left poignant and painful images that many of us will not soon forget. Coverage across television, web, and traditional print mediums were riveting and relentless. Given the 'boots on the ground' experience that some of MainStream GS' team members possess with relief and recovery efforts across diverse disasters such as hurricane Katrina, the earthquake in Pakistan, and the floods in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, many clients, colleagues, and friends have asked us to share our views of the challenges the relief and recovery process faces.

As in many crises and disasters incredible acts of bravery and heroism have not been lacking. The situation in Haiti has been no different; countless people have been rescued and saved against enormous odds. While search and rescue missions were taking place there was a growing amount of frustration with the



logistical challenges of getting much needed supplies, food and medicine from the airport and nearby ships to people in need. What we saw in Haiti was not unique, similar challenges are a common theme during disasters.

Looking ahead we are encouraged by strategies to building more resilient communities that are better equipped to respond to disasters. Part of these new strategies is when disaster strikes, taking a portfolio project management approach to the recovery effort.

The immediate response plan from any of these disasters is limited to saving lives and infrastructure; however, sustainable recovery supported by more resilient communities is much more complicated. This is where a portfolio project manager can be invaluable.

In the past, recovery was limited to restoring back to where a community or individual was before a disaster. Recovery from a disaster is a balance between money, capacity of the impacted groups, and shared values. Organizations will open up the "dusty" emergency response plan annually and practice just that, response in a table top exercise for a day or two.

Disasters on the scale of Haiti, Katrina, and the Tsunami, take people and organizations out of their "day job" for weeks, months, and potentially years. The relatively new approach to recovery has changed dramatically in just the last

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When disasters such as floods, hurricanes, tornados, ice storms, and earthquakes hit communities or regions, recovery requires a disciplined decision making process based on experience with business, civil society, and government. Mainstream GS' experienced Disaster Management Recovery Project Managers are best leveraged proactively to prepare your organization for a potential manmade or natural disaster. In the event of a disaster Mainstream GS should be brought in immediately by leadership and aligned with Federal Programs.

Our proven approach is grounded in fact based decision making and industry standard project management principles. This approach is consistently utilized through stakeholder interviews and in establishing partnerships across business, civil society, federal, state and local government. We deploy experienced Disaster Management Recovery Program and Project Managers to enable a Disaster Management Recovery Office which augments your existing organization. This allows you to focus on getting disaster and normal projects completed using volunteer, municipal, Chamber of Commerce, and non-profit community resources and processes. Where there is a duplication of work we deploy our deep experience in process optimization to ensure that limited resource value is maximized.

Mainstream GS can also work effectively at the Federal level to ensure there is a streamlined and straightforward plan for local communities and regions to leverage Federal programs effectively and efficiently.

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few years' post Hurricane Katrina (2005).

Now, affected communities are no longer satisfied with simply restoring their infrastructure to where it was just before a disaster. Today the goal is to "correct" the limitations of the infrastructure and make it resilient. Sustainable and resilient recovery fundamentally changes the historic assumptions of response and recovery.

Creating a sustainable recovery as defined by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is characterized as the 3 E's - Environment, Economics, and Equity. To fully embrace the concept, a perspective of a long balloon is used. The balloon has a finite amount of surface area and volume. If you squeeze one area the balance expands and similarly if you expand one area the rest has to contract. Every community has its vulnerable component where vulnerability is not just a function of degree of change but the degree of change that the community has the capacity to adapt to.

We fully endorse the strong push for resilient and sustainable recovery that can result in a stronger community than what existed prior to the disaster. This requires significant effort and overcoming resistance to change to new approaches.

Effort is needed to move from planning within departments to a portfolio project management approach across departments, agencies, government, business and the community taking into

account Environment, Economics and Equity. This effort, towards building resilient communities, is spawning a common set of tools supported by fact based decision making that leverages portfolio project management.

Recovery leaders can integrate disparate projects into a portfolio and manage them in a consistent manner. This allows communities to serve a diverse set of leaders and organizations through transparency of the problem(s) being addressed, material and labor resource required, milestones of progress, and consistent and reliable communication.

Having a consistent and transparent approach allows communities to leverage important project artifacts as an effective method for collaborating across the portfolio of similar projects and programs. This consistency at the Program level allows project team members to work as individuals and teams in resilient decision making. In disaster recovery it is critical that all participants understand the individual and community's capacity for change. The outcome of recovery is dependent on the constituents from business, civil society, and government to work as a "System" to support that transformation towards resiliency.

While Haiti's challenges prior to the earthquake were numerous and well documented, our recommendation is that in the long recovery effort ahead, serious focus, attention and skills be directed to creating a more resilient Haiti and the effort be supported by a portfolio project management

approach.

A recent example of disaster recovery supported by a portfolio project management approach is the City of Cedar Rapids, IA. In June of 2008 the City experienced massive flooding of the Cedar River. The river took seven days to crest at a record, 31.12 feet, 19.12 feet above flood stage. During the flood 14.9% of the City's land area was completely submerged by flood waters, including the entire downtown area. Damages from the flood were estimated at \$5.7 billion.

The historic context of this natural disaster was mirrored by the change in city government just preceding the flood. The City successfully completed the strategic move from a Commissioner form of Government to a City Council and City Manager form. Associated with that migration was the establishment of a new framework for shared values, policy, process and personnel. Simply put the core team was making measured progress until the capacity for change was exhausted due to the flood.

Within days after the flood, the City of Cedar Rapids engaged Mainstream GS for an initial six month effort to stand up a Project Management Office and enable a project management discipline to drive fact based decision making to support the hundreds of parallel projects undertaken for recovering the municipal infrastructure.

Mainstream GS deployed a highly seasoned program manager with proven real work experience in

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government, civil society, and government crisis management. This Project Management Professional (PMP) was directly aligned with the city, county, and state government as well as the philanthropic and business communities. Utilizing standard project management procedure, three principles (scope, cost, and schedule), commonly known as elements of the 'IRON TRIANGLE,' were addressed.

MainStream GS' prior disaster recovery experience was invaluable in assisting the community in meeting the three phases of disaster response. The three phases, lasting approximately 90 days in duration, include Phase I: Save lives and infrastructure; Phase II: Plan for the post disaster organization(s) and funding; and Phase III: Execute in the new reality.

Phase I results for Cedar Rapids showed great accomplishment with no lives lost in the epic flood despite substantial property damage, including thousands of homes.

To assist planning, in Phase II, MainStream GS facilitated in

the creation of a private-public partnership, the Economic Planning and Redevelopment Corporation (EPRC). This organization was essential to address the funding gap and streamline communication to provide hope and energy for recovery. As is true of most disasters, the federal response only addresses a small portion of the long term need. With available resources and the profound need for funding to address the \$5.7 billion impact MainStream GS centered the effort on assisting city leaders in plan development, introducing project management tools, and helping leaders of diverse organizations develop responses to their crisis issues.

Through these efforts the cornerstones of a resilient recovery were laid through Economic, Environmental, and Equity values included in Program and Project Performance both now and into the future. "With the contributions of Mainstream GS we are light years ahead of where we were during the dark hours immediately after the flood," commented Monica Vernon, Deputy Mayor and City of Cedar Rapids Council Member.

The Cedar Rapids community has made good progress in recovering from this disaster with scope beyond individual comprehension. MainStream GS' program management approach made a major contribution to the recovery by adding value and accelerating the recovery. The program management approach that MainStream GS facilitated is best summed up by Bob Cecil, Economic Development Administrator of the U.S. Department of Commerce, "The work MainStream GS contributed has brought the city and county forward years in their recovery."

In order to create more resilient recovery capacity in the face of limited funding, public and private organizations need to develop effective strategies that modify current recovery organizations. Communication and the associated inputs and outputs to create a resilient solution requires at a minimum a simple way of communicating needs, abilities, and capacity for change with a clear alignment and sense of equity for the individuals impacted.

At the time of this article, MainStream GS' leadership is engaged in efforts to advance the learning and knowledge transfer relative to creating resilient communities and taking a portfolio project management approach to long term sustainable disaster recovery management. For more information about MainStream GS or to discuss this article further please email contact@mainstreamllc.com or call 877.785.4888.



A year and a half after the flood Phase III of the recovery is just beginning for the City of Cedar Rapids. During the last leg of the engagement, MainStream GS created a framework to address the long-term goals and establish plans to breakthrough barriers, and to create a disciplined, self renewing project team.