

NORTHEAST FLORIDA REGIONAL 'COAD' WORKING GROUP NEWSLETTER

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER



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Northeast Florida Regional Council Establishes Regional COAD Working Group

WRITTEN BY ERIC ANDERSON & SEAN LAHAV

In the Spring of 2020, the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC), through its annual work program priorities, recognized the value and benefits that could be achieved if a "Regional COAD Working Group" were to be established in the region.

'Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD)' – also referred to by emergency management practitioners as 'Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD)' – are defined as broad, formal or informal, local networks of community and voluntary organizations that assist in disaster recovery. These organizations often extend deep into the local communities which they serve to include more traditional community non-profits, connections with local businesses, churches and more.

Regional Council staff organized and conducted initial meetings with COAD/VOAD leadership from each Northeast Florida county in August of 2020. Leadership from these local organizations then agreed to form a regional working group to support and grow the capabilities of local community and voluntary disaster recovery organizations (Continued on Page 3).

Duval County COAD Takes Shape

WRITTEN BY RAEALYN MEANS, MPA

Since fall of 2017, a number of organizations have partnered together through the Northeast Florida Long-Term Recovery Organization to address unmet needs of households impacted by Hurricane Irma. While the effort continues to address home repairs with a target sunset date of spring 2021, these same partner organizations together with leaders of Jacksonville have recognized the need for an ongoing collaboration among emergency management, nonprofit service organizations and the business community to prepare and respond to major disasters. This desire for a permanent year-round collaboration with an all-hazards approach has materialized through the Duval COAD (Community Organizations Active In Disasters).

The COAD coalition initially activated in late August 2019 during the threat of Hurricane Dorian and has hosted frequent roundtable calls this year during the COVID pandemic. Roundtable calls allowed organizations to elevate unmet needs resulting from the pandemic and identify resources to meet those needs. The platform proved invaluable to community organizations who appreciated the ability to stay connected with one another even during the “Safer at Home” Executive Order. According to COAD Chair John Sapora, “It really could be the perfect storm: dealing with the impacts of a major hurricane or flooding event while continuing to battle a public health crisis. The creation of this group was well-timed because we had this framework in place as the COVID pandemic reached our community.”



Initial member organizations of the Duval COAD formally approved Bylaws on June 17, 2020, and an Executive Committee and Officers on July 1, 2020. With 46 member organizations, the Duval COAD seeks to bring hope and foster more effective preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery for Duval County residents in times of disaster. With community education and preparedness at the forefront of the COAD's focus, the coalition has facilitated preparedness training, including a panel presentation "Preparing Your Organization for Disaster", which was co-hosted with the Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida and Jax Chamber, as well as working with the Salvation Army to provide "Preparing Your Congregation for Disaster" training to several faith-based groups in the area.

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Northeast Florida Regional Council Establishes Regional COAD Working Group (Continued)

The NEFRC has agreed to provide staff support to this working group, and is finalizing a workplan to support local COADs and VOADs. A needs assessment was also recently completed and the workplan reflects the needs and gaps identified by each local COAD and VOAD.

Council Staff will begin to implement program support in professional and volunteer training and exercises, newsletters and outreach materials, grant and funding support and COAD/VOAD program development (in consultation with Florida VOAD). In addition to establishing the working group, staff communicated these plans to state and national partners at Florida VOAD and FEMA Region 4. Both partners have expressed support for the establishment of a working group; and communicated that they will be providing guidance as goals and objectives become clearer.

Many disasters in Florida are regional in nature. As a result, the communication and collaboration of the working group should assist the region in times of greatest need. This working group is a first of its kind in the State of Florida. Through lessons learned at the local level, a long-term objective will be to see whether such a concept can be implemented in different jurisdictions across the state.

Flagler County CERT Program

WRITTEN BY SUZY GAMBLAIN

Flagler Volunteer Services is very active with our County's CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) Program. This program educates volunteers about disaster preparedness for the hazards that may impact our area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization and disaster medical operations. CERT offers a consistent, nationwide approach to volunteer training and organization that professional responders can rely on during disaster situations, allowing them to focus on more complex tasks.

This group of trained individuals/teams assist their community in the event of a disaster. They are the help until the help arrives. Currently training is done with a hybrid on online, hands on practicals and a disaster simulation event. Individuals who get CERT certified are called upon by us for various activities. Flagler Volunteer Services serves as ESF 15, therefore we have a great need for these trained volunteers during times of emergency.

Our county has more than a dozen volunteers to be trainers and a select group of these trainers are also "Train the trainer" Instructors. This group has trained over 200 volunteers over the past few years. Volunteers have helped with storms, missing person, traffic control, EM support, Department of Health support and community special events.

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