



GRANTEE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE

CDBG-DR Housing Recovery: Challenges, Best Practices, Lessons Learned, and Recommendations

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CDBG-DR Housing Recovery: Challenges, Best Practices, Lessons Learned, and Recommendations

This guide presents challenges identified by Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) grantees in planning and implementing their housing recovery programs. The Urban Institute explored these challenges recently in a project, *Improving the Speed of Housing Recovery Program Launch after Severe Disaster*, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). As part of the project, the Urban Institute interviewed a purposive sample of CDBG-DR grantees, technical assistance providers, and HUD staff to identify key areas of focus and concern. The following areas arose as core challenges that grantees faced when planning and implementing CDBG-DR housing recovery programs:

- **Staff capacity:** Developing expertise and capacity to design and implement post-disaster housing recovery efforts, especially in jurisdictions that rarely experience disasters. Hiring enough staff to ramp up quickly for early phases of program planning and implementation and providing ongoing staff training.
- **Grant administration:** Determining how to administer CDBG-DR funds and how to manage the recovery programs. Building local capacity among organizations administering housing recovery locally, and ensuring they have a sufficient pool of contractors and employers to draw on.
- **Recipient outreach:** Communicating with potential program beneficiaries regarding CDBG-DR program expectations and timeline. Reaching hard-to-serve populations, such as older residents, first-time homebuyers, and residents uncomfortable interfacing with the government.
- **Case management:** Developing case management models to meet the needs of beneficiaries and adequately training case managers. Setting up case management systems that support post-disaster housing recovery efforts.
- **Data management:** Drawing on a range of data sources to understand local housing needs after a disaster and inform program decisions. Developing internal data monitoring systems to collect and track data for long-term housing recovery programs.

Here we discuss each challenge, along with best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations identified through the study. This resource is intended to help grantees prepare for and address these challenges.

Staff Capacity

Developing expertise and capacity to design and implement post-disaster housing recovery efforts, especially in jurisdictions that rarely experience disasters.

Common Grantee Challenges

- **Staffing before funding arrives.** Hiring sufficient staff to ramp up quickly to develop the action plan and begin early phases of program implementation.
- **Attracting staff for short-term positions.** Finding qualified staff for short-term positions.
- **Determining when to hire internally or contract out.** Deciding which components of the housing recovery program to handle internally and which to contract out.
- **Handling staff turnover.** Dealing with turnover that may arise from burnout associated with long-term recovery or from experienced staff leaving to support other disaster recovery efforts or other opportunities within and outside the jurisdiction.
- **Lacking post-disaster staff capacity:**
 - difficulty determining how many staff members are needed;
 - lack of staff with housing recovery expertise (program management or technical/engineering skills); and
 - shortage of building and housing inspectors and permitting staff.

How Can CDBG-DR Grantees Build Staff Capacity?

Ensure that the grant's lead agency has relevant experience. While Nashville-Davidson County did not have prior disaster experience, its administering agency had implemented housing and infrastructure programs, thus allowing staff to apply this knowledge and skillset to the CDBG-DR work. The state of Iowa had a similar experience, noting the importance of involvement from senior staff with 30 years or more of housing experience. Tapping into staff at other departments who may have experience with Community Development Block Grant, Community Services Block Grant, Home Investment Partnerships Program, or other relevant knowledge can help staff working on DR get up to speed on the rules and regulations of the program.

Provide CDBG-DR-specific training for new staff. The Texas General Land Office (GLO) has developed an extensive training plan for onboarding new staff members within six weeks of being hired; permanent staff note the training was especially helpful for building staff capacity and skill. New employees receive a training binder and complete about 30 hours of self-paced training, including CDBG-DR 101, HUD financial management training, a GLO training, Open Records training, and a PBS Frontline documentary series, *Business of Disaster*.¹ The training is intended to give all CDBG-DR grantee employees a common framework. To provide ongoing coaching and support, GLO also matches new employees with more experienced staff mentors.

Draw on contractors to supplement staff and provide technical and policy expertise. This is especially key when ramping-up new, large scale programs under tight time constraints. Explore contract structures that allow for rapid mobilization.

Document best practices and lessons learned. At Texas GLO, key staff documented decisions and procedures in a continuity binder. This binder serves two purposes: (1) to refer to information in future disasters and (2) to inform the work of future staff after the current staff leaves. Preparing for future staff is important because staff burnout occurs, and turnover rates can be high.

Retain experienced staff, especially in jurisdictions that frequently experience disasters. For instance, New York City is developing an office of recovery preparedness that would have the expertise needed to plan for and lead housing recovery efforts, such as CDBG-DR programs, following disasters. The Texas GLO plans to ask its legislature for funding for at least a skeletal recovery staff to prepare for disaster recovery before federal funds become available.

¹ See "Business of Disaster," Frontline, May 24, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/business-of-disaster/>.

Give short-term staff the training and skills needed to transfer to other positions (e.g., policy, planning, and outreach jobs may lead to compliance and monitoring and communications jobs in the long term). Some larger repeat grantees, such as Louisiana and New York City (NYC), reported training CDBG-DR staff for more permanent positions. The NYC Mayor’s Office of Housing Recovery Operations (HRO) is working to transition staff into other agencies to keep them employed through city government as they wrap up Hurricane Sandy recovery.

Other Suggestions from Grantees and Stakeholders for Building Staff Capacity

- Identify a lead agency for CDBG-DR funded programs prior to a major disaster, to the greatest extent practical. Clearly define how that organization will interact with other governmental departments and with surrounding jurisdictions.
- Look to recent retirees with disaster recovery experience from other surrounding jurisdictions—those with disaster recovery experience—who can support program planning, policy development, and training, especially during the early phases of a program while staffing up. Recent retirees may not necessarily want long-term assignments but could help with shorter-term planning and implementation tasks.
- Ask other previous or current CDBG-DR grantees to share their job descriptions, then tailor descriptions to your program accordingly.
- Recruit from universities (recent graduates, interns, cooperative education students), especially for entry-level positions. These students have valuable skills (urban planning, architecture, engineering, information technology, geology, accounting, finance, financial management, communications, etc.), and they have room to advance in the field.
- Enlist universities for defined projects, such as data collection (e.g., surveys), data analysis, and literature reviews.
- Use mutual aid compacts/agreements with other jurisdictions to increase the number of building and housing inspectors and permitting staff.
- Invest in internal staff. All grantees seemed to agree that investing in internal staff should be the primary strategy. However, hiring consultants, as augmentations or backups to the organization’s staffing plan, can provide extra support when staffing is limited.

Additional Resources Available on HUD Exchange

| Staff Capacity | | |
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| <i>CDBG-DR staffing effort analysis tool</i> | Excel spreadsheet worksheets for planning program staff needs and identifying staffing gaps, with instructions and an example. | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CDBG-DR-Staffing-Analysis-Worksheet.xlsx |
| <i>Training and technical assistance guide</i> | An overview of key training-related tasks to consider over the grant, to ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge to administer CDBG-DR grants. Provides guidance on determining training needs, developing tailored training, and assessing training outcomes. | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CDBG-DR-Training.pdf |

Grant Administration

Determining how to administer CDBG-DR funds and how to manage the recovery programs.

Common Grantee Challenges

- **Deciding whether to administer programs directly or distribute funds to local government units.** States and urban counties determining whether to administer programs directly or subgrant to cooperating jurisdictions.
- **Handling lack of local capacity.** Building capacity to implement housing recovery through ongoing training and technical support.
- **Having a sufficient workforce in the community to carry out program activities.** Ensuring that there are enough qualified local contractors and employers, and creating workforce development programs to address gaps, if needed.

How Can CDBG-DR Grantees Approach Grant Administration to Most Effectively Support Housing Recovery on the Ground?

Consider hybrid state grant administration models in which the grantee runs some statewide programs and local governments run other programs. Following Hurricane Harvey, Texas GLO implemented state-run recovery programs in 48 counties and made direct allocations to Harris County and Houston. To engage closely at the local level, the state collaborated with long-term recovery committees in counties and cities throughout Texas. For instance, recovery committees helped publicize a checklist of materials and information that homeowners could start to gather in preparation for the application process.

Create a network of Council of Governments (COGs) to lead grant administration. Because of the number of counties (85) included in the presidential disaster declaration, Iowa used a network of 11 super COGs and 7 entitlement cities to administer CDBG-DR recovery following major flooding.² Super COGs were selected based on their experience and capacity to implement housing recovery programs. The super COGs were administrative hubs for working with and overseeing recovery programs within a particular geographic region.

Each super COG encompassed several counties, with the county in which the super COG was located acting as the lead and as a subrecipient of the state. The state helped the super COGs plan, administer, and manage recovery programs through ongoing technical assistance. A subrecipient could contract with a COG or other entity to administer the program.

Partner with other state and local agencies that have experience administering the types of programs that the grantee is funding (housing finance authority for multifamily rental housing deals, housing counseling agencies for housing counseling, etc.). According to Louisiana's Office of Community Development, even if these partnerships are not formalized or designated as subrecipients to the grantee, it is beneficial to involve other local agencies in planning processes early on—in a clearly defined role. States such as Minnesota and North Carolina have also developed formal interagency councils to foster collaboration for CDBG-DR recovery.

Help subrecipients understand CDBG-DR grant requirements. Set standards and program requirements early on in the grant period, particularly for quality control and oversight of contracting. Help subrecipients understand these standards and general CDBG-DR regulations. This can mean doing a lot of outreach and “boots on the ground” in-person technical assistance. It is also helpful to establish procedures for communicating changes in requirements, such as new rules or new required documentation.

Assign a grant manager to each local subgrantee to serve as a single point of contact for the CDBG-DR program and provide ongoing technical assistance. For example, Texas GLO has shifted to a portfolio management system, in which grant managers are assigned at the state level to each of the local subgrantees. Grant managers help walk subgrantees through the recovery process, providing tailored technical assistance for staff. This involves mini trainings over the grant life cycle, on such topics as

² See *State of Iowa Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Policies and Procedures Manual*, State of Iowa Economic Development, <https://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/userdocs/programs/CDBG-DR-Manual2017.pdf>. Use search term “COG.”

procurement, CDBG-DR national objectives, needs assessments, application and submissions requirements, and grant closeouts.

Develop a toolkit for subrecipient jurisdictions to help facilitate their learning and smooth program startup, especially those new to operating CDBG-DR. For instance, Texas GLO developed a guidebook to support subrecipient jurisdictions' grant planning, implementation, and management. This resource covered such topics as outreach procedures, procurement, and construction oversight—informed by lessons from past disaster recovery efforts. The guidebook can complement any ongoing, tailored assistance grantees receive.

Know the workforce's limitations to carry out housing recovery program activities in the affected community, and address these limitations. As part of its Build It Back program, New York City launched a workforce program, which included:³

- job matching and recruitment events with Build It Back contractors and other local employers, with impacted residents receiving priority access;
- job-training vouchers for union pre-apprenticeship programs, which provided the opportunity for direct entry to construction union apprenticeships; and
- career counseling, résumé editing, and practice interviews.

Other Suggestions from Grantees and Stakeholders for Approaching Grant

Administration

- Consider how you might cover operational expenses before HUD approves the CDBG-DR action plan. For instance, Texas GLO noted borrowing from general revenue funds to support these expenses. Keep in mind that grantees cannot use existing DR funds.
- Conduct an inventory of state and local agency capacity to identify areas of strength and limited capacity among agencies that can support CDBG-DR housing recovery efforts.
- Learn about program design, policies, and pitfalls through peer-to-peer engagement, trade associations, and academic studies.
- Identify high-risk areas that may be impacted by disasters. Engage in comprehensive pre-planning to determine how they might use funding for housing recovery after a disaster. Planning should also include information about who is going to do what (e.g., agency to agency, locality to locality), and potential data sources to draw on.
- Specific recommendations identified by the NYC Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations in its recently released report *Patterns of Attrition and Retention in the Build It Back Program* included the following:⁴
 - Group housing recovery program applicants by current housing situation so displaced residents (owners or renters) and at-risk homeowners can be prioritized more easily. Track displaced applicants to know whether they have reoccupied their homes after repairs or are still displaced, and assess the condition of the home, if reoccupied, because some may return to homes that are unsafe.
 - Communicate clearly about the application process and deadlines for completing applications. Assign a case manager when needed who can help with document submission, contractor selection, and finding other available resources during the application process.
 - Collaborate with nonprofit service providers during disaster assistance planning, especially nonprofit legal and financial counseling services.
 - Develop communications and outreach strategies to follow throughout the life of the program, manage expectations, and provide understandable and regularly updated information.

³ "Workforce," NYC Housing Recovery, New York City's Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/housingrecovery/programs/workforce.page>.

⁴ Joseph Pereira, Michael P. McCabe, John Mollenkopf, Jamey Van Epps, Haley Zernich, Supurna Banerjee, and Ellen Howard-Cooper, *Patterns of Attrition and Retention in the Build It Back Program* (New York: New York City Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations and City University of New York, The Graduate Center, 2019), https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/housingrecovery/downloads/pdf/2019/patterns_of_attrition_and_retention_in_the_build_it_back_program_02_2019_report.pdf.

Additional Resources Available on HUD Exchange

| Grant Administration | | |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Organizational models & potential partners for partnership model</i> | Overview of different ways to implement CDBG-DR grants, and a matrix of potential partners to work with in planning and administering CDBG-DR grants, including (1) the typical capacity of various partner types, (2) examples of CDBG-DR programs partners could implement, and (3) types of agreements for executing partnerships. | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CDBG-DR-Organizational-Models-And-Potential-Partners-Summary.pdf |
| <i>Sample subrecipient agreement</i> | Sample template of subrecipient agreement, with highlighted sections in yellow for grantees to adapt. | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CDBG-DR-Subrecipient-Agreement-Template.pdf |
| <i>Quality assurance/quality control procedures</i> | A set of procedures for engaging in monitoring and oversight of CDBG-DR programs, including housing programs. Can be used to inform subrecipient oversight. | https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg-dr/toolkits/program-implementation/ |
| <i>Duplication of benefits resources</i> | A list of statutory and regulatory references pertaining to duplication of benefits and some sample forms. | https://www.hudexchange.info/onecpd/assets/File/2015-CDBG-DR-Training-DOB-References.pdf |
| <i>Duplication of benefits case studies</i> | A duplication of benefits slide presentation covering definitions and guidance; case studies; sample policies, forms, and checklists; and monitoring tools. | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CDBG-DR-Duplication-of-Benefits-Slides.pdf |
| <i>Duplication of benefits pro tips: case studies, process, and documentation</i> | A duplication of benefits slide presentation covering case studies, process, and documentation. | https://www.hudexchange.info/course-content/2017-cdbg-dr-problem-solving-clinics/CDBG-DR-Duplication-of-Benefits.pdf |

Recipient Outreach

Communicating with potential program beneficiaries regarding CDBG-DR program expectations and timeline.

Common Grantee Challenges

- **Reaching hard-to-serve populations, such as older residents, first-time homebuyers, and residents uncomfortable interfacing with the government.** Using targeted strategies and messages to reach communities that may be more vulnerable after a disaster.
- **Making eligibility and other program requirements clear.** Ensuring that potential beneficiaries understand housing recovery program options and the requirements for available programs. Communicating when requirements change and/or case managers may need additional information from beneficiaries.
- **Managing beneficiary, media, and public expectations.** Communicating about housing recovery programs and their anticipated timelines clearly and consistently.

How Can CDBG-DR Grantees Effectively Communicate with CDBG-DR Housing Program Beneficiaries?

When conducting outreach, hire locally for individuals, agencies, and organizations that have experience in the community. Several grantees expressed the importance of hiring local staff who understand the unique needs of local neighborhoods and can help develop tailored outreach strategies. Grantees also pointed out that this can be an effective workforce development opportunity to train and employ local residents.

Use data to inform the outreach approach. For example, New Jersey's Department of Community Affairs drew on various data sources to determine the locations of residents who were most in need of CDBG-DR housing recovery programs and developed a tailored outreach strategy for impacted communities following Hurricane Sandy. For this analysis, the department used American Community Survey data on income and households, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Individual Assistance data, and Census data. The grantee also found the analysis helped determine language requirements among readers, ultimately translating these materials into 10 languages.

Provide explicit instructions on outreach forms and applications. For instance, New York City provided well-designed, user-friendly forms, one of which included the "F13" form to collect receipts/eligible expenses.⁵ All forms needed during the eligibility process were maintained on one central website. Outreach messaging also acknowledged limited resources, noting that the grantee would not be able to serve everyone through the program.

Use tip sheets and fact sheets to introduce programs to potential participants. New Jersey developed tip sheets⁶ and step-by-step web pages⁷ for its Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, Elevation, and Mitigation program.

Develop a guide that documents program procedure and requirements. For example, New York City⁸ and New Jersey⁹ created policy guides for their housing programs as reference points for additional information and clarification. These policy guides also provided information in a searchable way and created a resource where policies are clearly outlined for case managers to reference.

⁵ "Forms," NYC Housing Recovery, New York City Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/housingrecovery/programs/forms.page>.

⁶ See Tip Sheets under "RREM Homeowner Documents," reNew JerseyStronger, State of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, <https://www.renewjerseystronger.org/homeowners/rrem/rrem-homeowner-documents/>.

⁷ See "New Jersey RREM Step-by-Step," reNew JerseyStronger, State of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, <https://www.renewjerseystronger.org/homeowners/rrem/rrem-program-step-by-step/>.

⁸ See "Policy Manuals," NYC Housing Recovery, New York City Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/housingrecovery/resources/policy-manual.page>.

⁹ See "Sandy CDBG-DR Cross Cutting Policies," ReNew Jersey Stronger, State of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, <https://www.renewjerseystronger.org/plans-reports/sandy-cdbg-dr-policies/>.

Create tailored resources that help beneficiaries understand each stage of the program. These materials can outline the steps and requirements of key application milestones (e.g., intake, application review, property damage assessment, program option selection, award) of each CDBG-DR program offered to residents. This approach can be especially helpful with managing client's expectations. New York City¹⁰ and New Jersey¹¹ both used this technique.

Collaborate with community members and local organizations. For example, New York City identified block captains in neighborhoods that were particularly hard-hit to serve as local contacts for information sharing. They also co-located intake staff in the offices of local City Council members. Local efforts involved nonprofits and other government partners and going door-to-door if a paperwork deadline was coming up. Additionally, New Jersey partnered with the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, which acts as the main advocacy organization for many housing organizations throughout the state. Nashville also partnered with nonprofit organizations to help clients with the application process.

Use a Social Vulnerability Index to identify locations of vulnerable populations in your community to target for outreach. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹² and the University of South Carolina¹³ have developed such tools for mapping and understanding social vulnerability.

Draw on a range of outreach strategies to meet the diverse needs of residents. For example, in Texas, grantees used different strategies in rural areas, where they found radio and newspaper advertisements to be more effective, than in larger cities. Additionally, Texas now engages in preemptive marketing before hurricane season.

Other marketing ideas that grantees shared included going to churches, schools, barbershops, and community meetings and events, as well as sharing information through door-to-door campaigns, emails, mailings, and stuffers in grocery bags. Grantees also expressed the importance of using social media and the need to have team members skilled in social media, as this platform is becoming more central and effective for recovery outreach.

Support political leaders in accurately communicating with the public about recovery programs. Grantees encouraged CDBG-DR program leaders to have open and honest conversations with political officials about how long the recovery programs will take and the complexity of program implementation and management. This is especially important during political transitions. Texas GLO has developed a roadshow approach in which it briefs public officials on the purpose of CDBG-DR and the local portfolio of CDBG-DR grants. This roadshow is also intended to convey realistic expectations about how long recovery will take. It is also important to keep the media informed to manage expectations.

Other Suggestions from Grantees and Stakeholders for Effectively Communicating with CDBG-DR Housing Program Beneficiaries

- Specific recommendations identified by the NYC Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations in its report *Patterns of Attrition and Retention in the Build It Back Program* included the following:¹⁴
 - Cast a wide net for potential program participants.
 - Target at-risk populations.
 - Ensure language access.
 - Publish clear guidelines for all potential program participants.

¹⁰ See "Single Family Program," New York City Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations, https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/housingrecovery/downloads/pdf/2018/01-25-18_single_family_program_for%20archive.pdf.

¹¹ See "New Jersey RREM Step-by-Step," <https://www.renewjerseystronger.org/homeowners/rrem/rrem-program-step-by-step/>.

¹² See "CDC's Social Vulnerability Index," Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, last updated September 12, 2018, <https://svi.cdc.gov/>.

¹³ See "Social Vulnerability Index for the United States—2010-2014," University of South Carolina, Hazards & Vulnerability Research Institute, <http://artsandsciences.sc.edu/geog/hvri/sovi%20AE-0>.

¹⁴ Joseph Pereira, Michael P. McCabe, John Mollenkopf, Jamey Van Epps, Haley Zernich, Supurna Banerjee, and Ellen Howard-Cooper, *Patterns of Attrition and Retention in the Build It Back Program* (New York: New York City Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations and City University of New York, The Graduate Center, 2019), https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/housingrecovery/downloads/pdf/2019/patterns_of_attrition_and_retention_in_the_build_it_back_program_02_2019_report.pdf.

- Develop an online registration system and a robust document management system that can be used immediately following a disaster to identify and capture information on persons and properties affected.
- Work with the faith-based community as well as representatives of local community-based organizations or community development corporations to engage in program outreach and to counsel residents on recovery programs available.
- Make program staff easily accessible through forums like public meetings and 311 phone lines.
- Bridge short- and long-term outreach centers, by opening CDBG-DR assistance sites in the same place as the FEMA sites, as beneficiaries are already familiar with these locations.
- Send mobile teams to process applications in nearby areas where local populations have migrated after the disaster.

Additional Resources Available on HUD Exchange

| Recipient Outreach | | |
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| <i>Communications guide</i> | An overview of key communications-related tasks to consider over the course of the grant, so the grantee can serve as the hub for information communication with local communities, public officials, and the media. | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CDBG-DR-Communication-and-Outreach.pdf |
| <i>Intake application</i> | Sample intake application template for a homeowner rehab program; can be used in paper or electronic form. | https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg-dr/toolkits/program-implementation/ |

Case Management

Developing case management models to meet the needs of beneficiaries and adequately training case managers.

Common Grantee Challenges

- **Finding examples of good case management programs.** Building on existing case management models and determining how they can be customized to fit the local context.
- **Handling the costs and time of management system development and adaptation.** Developing or adapting case management systems, in the face of time and resources constraints.
- **Training case managers.** Providing ongoing training to case managers, taking into account that case managers may be experiencing trauma themselves as disaster survivors.

How Can CDBG-DR Grantees Maximize Case Management Efforts?

Do not overly rely on case management software to determine the necessary steps. Though case management software systems can help identify the next step in the recovery process for an applicant, some grantees pointed out that it is essential for case managers to monitor cases closely and determine when other steps are needed that are not identified by the system. Therefore, the automation of case management work can be supported through the system, but it is essential not to over-rely on the system.

Use data to help guide operations. When its data management system and reports from the city's 311 system showed few calls and applications coming from a certain area, New York City sent community relations staff door-to-door to avoid missing neighborhoods.

Draw on supports such as housing counseling, legal services, and especially financial counseling to reduce the attrition rate of housing recovery program registrants and applicants. Coordinating with other social service programs can be essential when implementing housing recovery efforts, as disaster survivors may need a range of supports to fully recover and maintain or return to their local community. Potential services to connect residents with include housing counseling, legal services, and financial counseling.

Support case managers with adequate training. Case managers must receive comprehensive training that allows them to fully understand the housing recovery programs offered and their eligibility requirements, as well as how to operate case management systems. Grantees should also consider training that helps case managers cope with the stress and trauma that applicants may be under, taking into account that case workers may also be disaster survivors themselves.

Use lessons learned to develop a case management shell for future disasters. For example, New York City has been developing a template for a case management system that it can draw on in the future, based on the key data fields it has found essential for implementing the Build It Back program.

Other Suggestions from Grantees and Stakeholders for Approaching Case Management

- Ensure that qualified staff, who are experienced at processing applications and are knowledgeable about your program's construction options, are available to provide case management services.
- Immediately following the disaster, gather individual resident data and property information in one central place. This should also include specifics about people still living in the home and to what extent the home is safe and sanitary. This would allow the grantee to more easily prioritize cases for homes that are uninhabitable, especially if residents are continuing to reside in them.
- Consider off-the-shelf software that can be adapted for case management. Some grantees have used Microsoft Dynamics 365 (New York City and Texas), which interacts with Office 365, and SharePoint; some have mentioned Salesforce CRM and Smartsheet.

- Think as comprehensively as possible about the data fields needed in the system to collect information in a manner that reduces burden on clients.
- When engaging in intake with homeowners, be sure to collect information about tenants to help connect renters to recovery programs.
- Partner with FEMA-funded disaster case management providers to help with outreach for available programs. These providers can expedite implementation, understand need on the ground, and assist with data collection.

Additional Resources Available on HUD Exchange

| Case Management | | |
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| <i>Housing counseling disaster recovery toolkit</i> | A factsheet on “Partners for Disaster Recovery,” noting community stakeholder partners that can help strengthen housing recovery efforts; in particular, detailing how to collaborate with service providers (e.g., mental health services, substance use programs, shelters, and healthcare entities) | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/OHC-DR-Toolkit-Partners-for-Disaster-Recovery.pdf |
| <i>Housing counseling disaster program guide</i> | A program guide for using housing counseling during disaster recovery. | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Housing-Counseling-Disaster-Program-Guide.pdf |
| <i>Disaster recovery homelessness toolkit</i> | A website with a local guide for addressing people experiencing homelessness in disaster planning efforts, and guides for meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness during disaster response and recovery. | https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/disaster-recovery-homelessness-toolkit/ |

Data Management

Drawing on a range of data sources to understand local housing needs after a disaster and inform program decisions.

Common Grantee Challenges

- **Developing and adapting data systems.** Creating effective systems to collect and track data during long-term recovery.
- **Knowing the available data sources and their limitations.** Drawing on a range of data to inform program planning, particularly during needs assessment and action plan development.
- **Obtaining complete and accurate data.** Getting quality data from other organizations, such as FEMA, to inform the needs assessment.
- **Translating data into housing activity selections and program design.** Using data to inform programmatic efforts and clearly communicating how data shaped program design.

How Can CDBG-DR Grantees Use Data to Design and Monitor Post-Disaster Housing Programs?

Draw on data systems that other jurisdictions have developed. For example, Iowa established its own data system, and has offered it to other CDBG-DR grantees. New Jersey and its contractor developed the Sandy Integrated Recovery Operations and Management System (SIROMS), a grants management and business process management tool. SIROMS contains a housing module as well as 14 other modules, including financial management, program income, and activities for the disaster recovery grant reporting (DRGR) system. New Jersey found that it often needed to add documents to its business process. New York City built its own data management system based on Microsoft Dynamics 365. The city found that customization leads to complexity, so someone needs to oversee data management to see how one system will affect others. NYC also suggested buying computer equipment and devices at the frontend to computerize or digitize the process and reduce paper processing and to ensure the possibility of losing or mis-categorizing documents is diminished.

Understand complexities of developing new systems. Several grantees indicated that although developing a new system allows for helpful customization, it can also be challenging to develop the system and begin the program launch simultaneously. Take time to develop the system on the front end, customizing where necessary. Consider key indicators that will be integral to collect and track. And understand on the front end that you will likely need to build in time over the project for ongoing updates to the data system.

When contracting out data management work, ensure that you have full access to the data and maintain ownership of the data at the completion of the project. If contracting out for system development and management, it is essential to have the legal rights to the underlying data. This includes accessing that data, such as through a third-party data management system, and maintaining that data, even after a contract ends. Having legal rights to the data is crucial, especially if the grantee decides to use another contractor or take on the data management work themselves.

Connect unmet needs data to program model decisions in the action plan, linking data to a particular program to show why it was selected. Clearly identify data used to understand recovery needs and to develop plans for housing recovery, rather than allowing local pressures to drive programmatic plans. For example, Lexington County in South Carolina combined the discussion of unmet need with program rationale within the action plan, to clearly connect data with programmatic decisions in the aftermath of major flooding.¹⁵

¹⁵ See “CDBG Disaster Recovery Action Plan,” Lexington County, South Carolina, <https://lex-co.sc.gov/departments/community-development/block-grant-program/disaster-recovery/cdbg-disaster-recovery>.

Other Suggestions from Grantees and Stakeholders for Using Data to Design and Monitor Post-Disaster Housing Programs

- For grantees susceptible to multiple disasters, be careful not to over-customize the case management/data system—this could cause delays in the future, when edits might need to be made.
- Make sure the grant management system aligns well with the reporting that must be done in HUD’s Disaster Recovery Grant Reporting system.
- All systems of record should contain a monitor-friendly interface to allow for expedient review by HUD and HUD’s Office of the Inspector General.
- Create dynamic life-cycle systems that can quickly adapt to feedback from monitoring and auditing entities.
- Ensure that the systems you will need (grants management, project management, financial management, etc.) can share information across platforms.
- Consider developing a data governance framework to identify set processes for collecting, managing, and archiving data, all of which are essential to preserve data quality during long-term recovery.
- Recognize that there are two types of data management systems: a system that captures data to inform management and a life-cycle system that guides the program workflow step-by-step.

Additional Resources Available on HUD Exchange

| Data Management | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>IT and data systems guide</i> | An overview of key data system–related tasks to consider over the grant, to document program expenditures and track program efforts. | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CDBG-DR-Data-Systems-and-Reporting.pdf |
| <i>Sample request for FEMA data</i> | Sample data request—with sections for grantees to adapt highlighted in yellow—to request data for the unmet needs analysis and duplication of benefits process. Includes potential data fields that grantees can request. | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CDBG-DR-Sample-Request-for-FEMA-Data.pdf |
| <i>Data sources</i> | List of commonly available data from federal, state, and local resources to inform the unmet needs assessment (e.g., various FEMA sources, US Census, state Housing Finance Agencies). | https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Disaster-Recovery-Disaster-Impact-Needs-Assessment-Kit-App-C-Data-Sources.pdf |
| <i>DRGR user manual</i> | A step-by-step guide to using the DRGR system to enter programmatic data and produce reports. | https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/drgr/guides/#drgr-user-manual |