

Shifting the Paradigm for Engaging “Congregation Based Resources” (CBR)

Background

Previous strategies for religion sector engagement have not achieved the scope of congregational partnerships to secure the potential resources of people, material goods and sites.

Involvement of FEMA, Red Cross and state and local emergency management agencies have focused on faith based organizations, denominational entities, and interfaith collaboratives.

National studies have concluded that religion sector partnerships have not been systemic nor have they extended over time.

In 2002, the leadership of the Peninsula Community Foundation was among those who recognized that repeated efforts to engage the vast congregation based resources in the community were consistently unsuccessful. What they uniquely recognized was that every sector they worked with, except the religion sector, had an entity that provided for their engagement with the professional leadership cadre of that sector. The Foundation funded a project which successfully achieved a structure of components and methodology for networking clergy. As anticipated, this resulted in the long sought systemic collaboration with congregations by region or as delineated by denomination, demographics and geographic area.

This structure was successfully utilized in a three year grant to design and pilot a system which structured congregations as components within the San Mateo County Office of Emergency Services emergency response plan. The focus of this plan was a structure of congregations which anchored neighborhood response systems in the first moments and days of an incident of any nature.

On Site assessment: Hurricane Sandy - Rockaways Response

In March, 2013, Rabbi Jay Miller, project director for the San Mateo County based pilot, spent three days of onsite interviews in the Rockaways and Brooklyn. He gathered data from key coordinators of the Occupy Sandy and Congregation centered response. He met with residents who shared in, and continue to work within this coordinated structure.

Rabbi Miller reviewed the unique combination of circumstance and resulting outcomes in this incident.

The morning after Sandy hit, two events shaped the response.

- A. The clergy of two congregations in Brooklyn immediately initiated steps to utilize their facilities as centers for the coordination of people and material goods to support the Sandy survivors.

- B. Individuals who had coordinated aspects of the Occupy Movement in various locations throughout New York City communicated with each other and determined that the Occupy Movement should mobilize on behalf of the survivors in the Rockaways and two other impacted areas in New York City.

The Occupy Movement had the experience of ongoing relationships with congregations. This resulted in an established base of understanding for collaboration between the Occupy Sandy coordinators and the two lead congregations.

The details of the depth of resources afforded by this collaboration in the immediate hours of response are contained in additional documentation from Rabbi Miller's interviews.

The immediate question facing regional and national authorities who observed this collaboration is, "how can it be achieved outside New York and in a sustained model?"

In Rabbi Miller's interviews, three pieces of data from the clergy and coordinators linked components of the San Mateo County based plan with components of the Rockaway response, providing the answer to this question.

1. The nature of the Occupy Sandy team.
In describing the initial mobilization of Occupy associated individuals, it was clear that there were certain qualities they brought to the incident that framed their capacity to respond to the immediacy of the situation:
 - A. Levels of existing relationship: working side by side, facial recognition from frequent encounters at events, mutual relationships, mutually held values.
 - B. A high level of trust.
 - C. Knowledge of each other's contact information in diverse modes of communication - cell/email/text/Facebook/etc.
 - D. Specialist in spontaneous project management - coordination of sites, food, logistics, crowd control.
 - E. Previous experience working in congregational relationships.
 - F. Previous experience working with city and non-profit agencies.

It is Rabbi Miller's assessment that these individuals provided spontaneous "middle management," a necessary asset previously unavailable at the array of active sites in the immediate moments following the disaster.

In the San Mateo County plan, it is the established teams of congregants that share exactly the same specific qualities.

2. The geographic coverage.
Response Centers: In the words of one of the response coordinators, "There was one additional thing we had going for us, the Rockaways are long and narrow with numbered streets. We determined we needed to establish a response center every 20th block."

IN and OUT of the area of the incident: Another response coordinator identified the value of having unique sites of coordination in the inside and outside the incident area.

The serendipity of the geographic layout of the Rockaways served the immediate delineation of response centers. **The San Mateo County based model is established on a pre-delineated cluster design, in which neighborhoods are geographically segmented by cluster. At geographic intervals within Clusters, three "core congregations" on a single block or intersection, are designated as the "Neighborhood Response Center" (NRC) and all other congregations in the cluster are "support congregations."**

The San Mateo County based design assumed response in clusters where the incident occurred.

The Rockaways interviews provided insight into a model revision for the clusters model. In the revised design, a cluster would be organized and drilled to activate as either (a) “IncidentIN” or (b) “IncidentOUT.”

3. The critical added aspect which is afforded by the existing San Mateo County based model is the pre-incident phase. What uniquely emerged in the Rockaways and Brooklyn are the components which are pre-established through the pre-incident implementation of the plan developed in San Mateo County based model.

Based on the capacity to establish comprehensive and sustained congregation partnerships, the community residents are able to benefit from shared response, not isolated response “on your own.” Based on the monitoring and evaluation of the pilot “Neighborhood Disaster Drill” the plan now includes a system of designated Crews of eight adjacent homes or apartments. A Crew manual instructs the individuals in each Crew in establishing team monitors for aspects of response (gas, injury, childcare) and mutual awareness of home specific needs (Rx’s, physical limitation, family demographics). This designation of Crews links (re-links) neighbors so that they have established relationships in place at times of need for individual support, family occurrences or neighborhood based or community incidents.

The components in this pre-incident coordination provide extensive benefit in extending the value of CERT programs. It also extends the level of current coordination of spontaneous volunteers and donations, a significant percentage of which currently come unmonitored from congregations. In this system, congregation based centers combine information and coordination regarding needed people and donations.

April 22, 2013

Rabbi Jay Miller RELIGION SECTOR 3.0

*1.0 On the Town Square 2.0 Walls of Separation
3.0 Alignment: Among Congregations - Within Society*

jaymiller@blueconnect.org 650.740.4411