

What is a Neighborhood Center?

A Neighborhood Center is a location where people can find a variety of kinds of help after a disaster. The designated Neighborhood Center will be located in the lead church's facility, but they will be partnered with other churches working together to meet the needs of the surrounding community to the best of their ability. Depending on the degree of preparation the networked churches have done, they can work together to provide individuals coming to the center with a meal, some groceries, answers to questions about FEMA, or information on where they can find help for their baby who needs special formula. They may get a prayer and an encouraging word while finding that there are people who are interested in THEM as individuals, not just as a number or one in a line of 4000 people. The Neighborhood Centers will be networked with other disaster organizations such as the Manatee County Emergency Management Branch, FEMA, and Convoy of Hope

Why are church-sponsored Neighborhood Centers Important?

A Neighborhood Center operates as an assistance center in a location in the immediate neighborhood of those in need so they don't have to travel a great distance. In times of disaster, communication is difficult, sometimes almost non-existent, and people don't know where to find help. Additionally, many people do not have cars (or the gas to drive them) and often the assistance being offered is positioned in a variety of distribution locations throughout the county which means people may have to travel from place to place trying to find the various kinds of help they need. They may then have to wait for hours in a line only to find that the assistance (like baby formula) they need is not being distributed at that particular site. This is extremely frustrating for people who are already hot, confused, distraught, and may not have transportation. And because FEMA Distribution Centers often only have ice, water, and tarps to distribute, a Neighborhood Center can also play a key role by providing meals and other food items in addition to other services that churches are ideally suited to provide like child care, counseling, and spiritual or emotional care. The network of disaster response agencies and other churches that Network of Hope has established is a key element as it allows churches, through their Neighborhood Center, to be able to share as much information as possible during this volatile time to help those in need find the assistance they require.

What is the process for establishing a Network of Hope mission at your church?

1. A Network of Hope representative will meet with the Pastor(s) of your church and any individuals he/she would like present to explain the mission and vision of the organization and how your church can be a part. The Pastor(s) need(s) to understand the Network of Hope concept as they will most likely be called upon during a disaster to serve in a ministering role, regardless of the degree of participation the church takes on.
2. Once your church has felt a calling to either be the lead church for a Neighborhood Center or to provide support to a Neighborhood Center, the Pastor will need to recruit a Network of Hope

Church Coordinator and Assistant Church Coordinator who also feel called to serve as leaders for this mission. This can either be done prior to presenting the mission to the congregation as a whole or after the mission is presented and a leader comes forward.

3. The mission and vision of Network of Hope can be presented to the congregation in a variety of ways. It can be done from the pulpit, from the Church Coordinator who has already stepped up, in a letter, or in a meeting. The purpose of this first communication is to explain how members can become a part of the ministry. It should be presented as a ministry and a way to serve the Lord. It is not to be a solicitation for volunteers, but rather an opportunity for people who have a heart for the ministry and maybe even gifts for this type of mission. Not much time will be spent on the big concept, which can be overwhelming, but most of the information should center on the Outreach Teams so individuals can see right away where they can plug in (use the one page summary of Outreach Teams). It is important to explain that this mission is about being the hands and feet of Jesus to the community. At this time, a follow-up meeting should be announced for interested members and emphasize that everyone who attends this meeting will receive a Disaster Preparedness Packet of Resources for their own personal preparedness.

4. The Church Coordinator will set-up follow-up meeting with refreshments or a potluck dinner where a Network of Hope representative will present a more in-depth explanation of Network of Hope Neighborhood Centers, beginning with a photo slideshow of past disasters and finishing by answering member questions. At the meeting, a table should be set-up for each Outreach Team with copies of the team description and a sign-up list for each. At the end of the meeting, a Disaster Preparedness Packet of Resources will be handed out to all attendees and they will be encouraged to visit the Outreach Team tables to sign-up for the mission they are gifted for and feeling a calling to work with. If Outreach Team Leaders have already been recruited, have these leaders manning the team tables to talk to those interested in their team. There are several ways of approaching getting Outreach Team Leaders:

- The Church Coordinator recruits Outreach Team Leaders ahead of time based on their gifts and passions, but this only works well if the Church Coordinator knows individuals well and is good at recruiting leaders
- Those interested in particular teams can meet together and pick a team leader and assistant team leader
- The Church Coordinator can recruit these positions from the list of those interested after the meeting

5. There are thirteen Outreach Teams that your church can take on to support a Neighborhood Center. You may feel that you do not have enough volunteers, money, equipment, or time to support all of these teams, so you should trust God and prioritize those missions which will provide the most return for your effort and will yield the highest return in terms of changed lives

and fit your tasks to the abilities of your volunteers and NOH will assist you in partnering with other churches who are also supporting a Neighborhood Center.

6. Once Outreach Team Leaders and Assistant Leaders have been found, the teams should be encouraged to reach out to their friends to recruit additional members as these will be people they will feel comfortable working with and who share their passions and interests for the mission. Don't hesitate to let non-involved people observe and work along with those who have volunteered as they may become interested and involved later on.

7. After Outreach Teams have been established, your Church Coordinator must ensure that the teams are meeting regularly to prepare a plan for how they will implement their mission after a disaster. It is important that you don't ask for volunteers and then not follow-up with them...they need to begin work on their plan so the don't feel under-utilized. This plan should be updated annually before hurricane season, and NOH Outreach Team Planning Worksheet (Attachment 1) submitted to NOH for each Outreach Team their church is supporting.

8. The Network of Hope Church Coordinator will ensure NOH trainings are advertised and promoted at their church and will keep track of members who have been trained from their church. Trainings required for the Church Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator, and Team Leaders include: Early Response Training, Ministry to Survivor's of Disaster/Trauma and the Responder, Working with Volunteers During Disaster", and an optional Resiliency Training. The Church Coordinator and Assistant Church Coordinator are also required to attend Monthly Coordinator Meetings (from February – November) with a NOH representative to share ideas and coordinate with other Neighborhood Center Coordinators on a variety of shared concerns.

9. It is recommended that the Church Coordinator scheduling an annual exercise for the Outreach Teams so they can practice implementing their plans.

10. You should expect some turnover of volunteers and while this can be a cause for concern as you may lose well-trained and competent people, it is important to trust that God is all knowing and that he will provide others to fulfill his mission.

Things to consider when working with volunteers:

1. Try to incorporate roles for children and youth of volunteers where they can work as families to support an Outreach Team. Parents with children need to feel comfortable volunteering and want to know their children will be welcomed. This also models some very important values to the children and builds teamwork and creates memories for the family. Families with children can help in the Child Care Outreach Team or Meal Serving and Families with Youth can help with physical tasks on many teams where older volunteers may not want to do those physically taxing tasks.

2. Remember that volunteers have a life outside of church where they are juggling family, work and other responsibilities. Bear this in mind when scheduling meetings, trainings, and exercises. Start and end your meetings on time, be prepared, and eliminate unnecessary meetings.
3. Speak privately to volunteers when they have said something that is inappropriate or unkind and ensure that team members are not discussing negative things about other individuals in a group situation. If you have people on your teams that continually put people down or are gossiping, deal with them quickly by giving them a warning or two, but if the behavior persists, remove them from the team immediately.
4. If a problem occurs, the leader should take the blame for the mistake publicly and then deal with the problem privately. Also, take every opportunity to spotlight people or teams who have contributed to the ministry. Always deflect the glory to God and thanks to your team.
5. Sometimes people will join teams to further their business. If they are constantly talking about their product or service and trying to sell to members of the team, this can cause problems for the cohesiveness of the team. Make it clear when the group first begins meeting together that while during meetings the group will need to remain focused on selling the life-changing message of Jesus through our gifts of hospitality in the event of a disaster.
6. It is also recommended that you take time to show your appreciation for the volunteers and spouses who have agreed to take on this commitment. Find ways to praise them and to reward them for their efforts. Volunteers are unpaid servants of God who want to make a difference in the lives of their neighbors so make sure you take care of them.

Things to consider when working with volunteers during a disaster:

There are a wide variety of concerns when working with volunteers during a disaster and Network of Hope offers a training called, "Working with Volunteers During Disaster" which addresses these concerns and the Church Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator, and Team Leaders are required to attend this training.

Attachments:

1. Outreach Team Planning Worksheet

Portions of these guidelines were paraphrased from, [Simply Strategic Volunteers: Empowering People for Ministry](#), by Tony Morgan and Tim Stevens, 2005.