



How to Use Your House of Worship in a Disaster

From shelters and service centers to warehouses and volunteer staging areas, there are many ways that your facility can support a disaster response and recovery operation. The challenge is to use your building in a way that is consistent with your capabilities, and aligns with your mission and other programs. To do this takes advanced planning and close coordination with disaster management and human service networks. Here are some tips that will help.

Mitigation & Preparedness

Mitigation - The action of preventing the severity or intensity of the disaster's impact on your facility and community.

- Plan for existing and expanded ministries. If your disaster plan calls for maintaining ongoing programs, ensure you account for the resources you may need to support them. See **NYDIS Disaster Tip Sheet “Continuity of Operations Planning: Ministry & Services Post-Disaster.”**
- Take inventory of your space and special equipment:
 - **Electrical and plumbing configurations** – generators, lighting, outlets, pipes, shut-off valve, wiring, etc.
 - **All assets** including those outside the City. (City assets may not be useable or an ideal location for certain operations, such as staging areas and warehouses.)
 - The **physical stability or other limitations** of your building(s).
 - **Type of space** and square footage of areas you could offer.
 - **Building codes** and occupancy limits including handicap access.
 - Non-Perishable **Food Items and Storage**.
 - Commercial kitchens.
 - Bathroom and shower capacity.
- Coordinate with:
 - Your religious organization's **national disaster offices**. Identify what their facility needs will be during disasters. See **NYDIS Disaster Tip Sheet “National Faith-Based Disaster Service Organizations.”**
 - **Houses of worship and other organizations in your neighborhood**. Consider planning to combine programs/religious services in order to make space available for a recovery operation.
 - Specific **disaster response and recovery organizations** (see below).
 - Local **Interfaith & Emergency Management Networks**, through New York Disaster Interfaith Services (www.nydis.org) or New York City Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NYCVOAD).
 - Consider **which populations you are uniquely positioned to serve** (i.e. those with a particular type of disability or medical issue, or those from a specific culture, or age group).
- **Secure written agreements** and memorandums of understanding (MOUs). Clarify each party's responsibilities, address liability issues, etc.
- Ensure there is physical access and other **accommodations for the disabled and the elderly**.

Response & Recovery

- **Consider the extent to which your house of worship has been affected** by the disaster and evaluate your ability to go forward with your plans. Think about:
 - **Impact on people** - yourself and family, key leadership, support personnel.
 - **Damage to facilities and equipment**, availability of back-up sites, etc.
- **Activation & Needs Assessment** (Note: Your plans should detail exactly how the use of your resources will be triggered):
 - **Confirm the need** for your resources with the appropriate organization.
 - If your resources have not been requested, make sure you have a **clear assessment of the post-disaster conditions** to ensure that resources you wish to share are needed.
 - **Coordinate** both with your neighborhood and Citywide networks (NYDIS, NYCVOAD).
- Consider **“Radical Hospitality”** - Perhaps there is a compelling need that presents itself in your neighborhood that does not fit into your plan. Consider it. Sometimes the right thing to do is not particularly comfortable or well suited to your facility or mission.
- **Be flexible and adapt to changing needs**. Consider both how needs for physical resources will change through the recovery process, as well as how your congregation's needs will change.

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Ways to Use Your Facility During Disaster Response & Recovery

Please note that comments regarding “considerations” are general in nature. Basic elements such as appropriate number of restrooms should be considered for all uses. Always coordinate with NYCVOAD as well as the specific organizations listed.

Disaster Uses for Your Building	General Considerations	Coordination Organization
Headquarters for your religious organization's disaster program	Requirements will vary depending on size of operation	Your religious organization's disaster program lead
Safe space; area for prayer/meditation, emotional and spiritual care	Many types of spaces will work; ensure adequate private space.	Neighboring houses of worship; NYDIS
Disaster-related funerals: It is possible that one or two houses of worship could have the largest percentage of disaster-related funerals.	Consider how to create a welcoming physical space for those that may not be of your denomination/faith tradition.	Other houses of worship
Disaster Assistance Service Center	Large spaces with capability of supporting many computers, etc.	New York City Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
Respite Center for workers	Large spaces; Consider access to food, space for private sessions,	OEM; American Red Cross in Greater New York (ARC)
Space for liturgical services & special events	Many types of space will work	Neighborhood houses of worship, and other community based organizations
Volunteer staging and training area	Proximity to work areas	New York Cares
Reception Centers - Temporary spaces for displaced victims to receive basic services, refreshments, re-assurance, information, use of restrooms, etc.	Relatively large space; tables & chairs; restrooms	ARC (for use during local events); NYDIS - piloting the Ready Receiving Centers program for use during large-scale evacuations and events
Cooling Center (during heat emergencies)	Large space with air conditioning that could be open to the public	OEM (Contact through NYDIS)
Fixed Feeding Station/or places where organizations can produce meals	Large kitchen and possibly dining area	ARC, The Salvation Army, VOAD
Hosting work and service groups from other congregations	Sleeping accommodations	Your national/regional religious organization
Hosting coordination meetings for various human services functions	Many types of space will work	NYDIS, VOAD, OEM, HSC
Community Information Meetings, where organizations can present what assistance is available and how to get it	Large open area	NYDIS, ARC, local Social Service agencies
Sheltering (See NYDIS Disaster Tip Sheet “Faith Communities & Disaster Sheltering”)	Sleeping accommodations	ARC

Contact Information for Organizations Listed Above

- New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS): www.nydis.org 212.669.6100.
- American Red Cross in Greater New York (ARC-GNY): www.nyredcross.org 1.877.REDCROSS.
- New York City Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NYCVOAD): 212.669.6100.
- New York Cares (NYCARES): www.nycares.org 212.228.5000.
- The Salvation Army of Greater New York: www.salvationarmy-newyork.org 212.337.7200.
- New York State Emergency Management Office (NYSEMO): www.semo.state.ny.us 1.518.292.2200
- New York City Office of Emergency Management (NYC OEM): www.nyc.gov/oem 311.
- National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD): www.nvoad.org 202.955.8396.

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