



Business Roundtable  
Partnership for Disaster Relief

# How Can My Company Help?

A Guide for Country Managers in Responding to Natural Disasters





Cover: Earthquake Survivors in Muzaffarbad Await Aid  
Photography: 55958726, Paula Bronstein. Courtesy of Getty Images

This page: Earthquake Survivors Aid in  
Clearing the Rubble

Photography: 55879827, Paula Bronstein. Courtesy of Getty Images

## How Can My Company Help?

**U.S. companies are playing an increasingly important role in responding to natural disasters. Corporate cash and in kind contributions to relief efforts are growing and the private sector—with its range of resources—is becoming more active in working with governments and aid organizations to help ensure a more effective response.**

*How Can My Company Help?* is intended to help you prepare for a local corporate response to a crisis in your country or region. This guide includes information on: building partnerships with relief agencies, assessing on-the-ground needs, identifying the products, expertise, personnel and services your company may be able to donate, encouraging and facilitating additional financial support, and communicating your charitable response internally and externally.

Preparation is key to providing valuable assistance at a time of crisis. We hope this guide will help you respond proactively and creatively to the immense social and economic challenges that a natural disaster inflicts on communities.

The private sector has demonstrated that it can play a pivotal role in responding to natural disasters. While U.S. companies have traditionally been generous in contributing to disaster relief efforts, they are now extending their commitment beyond financial support. Increasingly, companies are donating a diverse set of supplies, equipment, services and expertise to enhance on-the-ground relief activities – thereby helping to save more lives after a disaster.

Companies that have operations in an area struck by disaster have an opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to help those who have survived by supporting relief organizations' critical work.

The first order of business after a disaster is ensuring that your employees and their families are safe and that your facilities are secured. These issues are likely discussed in your company's crisis management plan.

*How Can My Company Help?* addresses the next phase of response: collaborating with other companies, the government and nongovernmental organizations to help communities affected by a disaster.

Host governments and relief agencies play the most important role in relief and recovery, but they often do not have relationships with corporations

that could support their efforts. This lack of coordination of private sector resources can cause life-threatening delays when timing is crucial.

Your company may be very well positioned to provide tremendous assistance both in advance and after a disaster. As a local office of a multinational corporation, you have the guidance and resources of U.S. headquarters to support you as you manage a company affected by crisis. You also have first-hand experience to identify and assess local needs and communicate these abroad.

And, as a business leader in the community, you have an important voice in the network of influential individuals who will be charged with making vital decisions after a disaster to ensure the stability of the community.

## What Can My Company Do to Help When a Disaster Strikes in My Region?

Especially during a time of crisis, it is essential to be sensitive to local cultural issues. Listening and understanding how a community reacts to a disaster will help your company respond in a respectful way that will be welcomed and appreciated. There are many non-business issues that emerge at the time of a disaster that may be unfamiliar. These include coping with loss, illness and death, attitudes toward charity, treatment of sacred or ritual space, and others that may reflect different beliefs and values.

In addition to preparing for the massive upheaval that a disaster brings, companies should always be attentive to the individual cultures in which they operate.



Earthquake Survivors Reach for 5 kg Bags of Rice from an Aid Organization October 16, 2005 in Balakot, Pakistan.  
*Photography: 55933251, Paula Bronstein; Courtesy of Getty Images*

### Building Partnerships in Your Corporate Communities

Consider joining with other companies to host an event with the major relief agencies in your region. This can be an opportunity for corporate executives to learn more about on-the-ground

relief activities, understand agencies' different areas of expertise and identify potential partners. These events can also introduce relief agencies to the local corporate community and the potential resources that companies, individually and collectively, can provide to strengthen relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts. You may find some national and international relief agencies represented among the members of local service organizations, such as Rotary.

### Know Your Company's Policy on Responding to Disasters

Identify the person or department within your company that has responsibility for the company's disaster policy and its implementation. Have a copy of this policy on hand or know where to locate it.

**Start building relationships now with relief agencies.  
Advanced planning is critical.**

### Reach Out to Relief Agencies Now

The best way to respond effectively to a disaster is to work with organizations that you know and trust. Start building relationships now with relief agencies. Advanced planning is critical. You will be much better prepared to assess needs and contribute your company's resources – and to be confident that your resources are being used efficiently – if you have established partnerships in place and know who to call during a crisis.

There are many actors involved in disaster relief. These include the national government, local governments, the military, foreign governments, United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations.

View Through Window of Building Destroyed in Tsunami  
*Photographer: Ahmad Yusni, epa*



Nongovernmental relief agencies include both locally based organizations and international ones. Your national Red Cross or Red Crescent society ([www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)) has disaster relief within its mandate so check with it first to identify local organizations with disaster response capabilities. If there is an office of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in your country, it may be of assistance in putting you in touch with strong local organizations.

In addition, there are many U.S.-based international relief agencies that are well respected. If the country is caught up in conflict or is host to a refugee population, one or more U.S. relief agencies may already be operating there. A number of U.S. organizations that undertake development projects also engage in disaster response when there is a crisis. USAID should be able to help you identify their presence.

Reach out to these organizations' leaders now to begin discussing the various ways you can work together to prepare for a disaster.

Some of the U.S.-based relief agencies with the broadest reach and likely to have local operations include:

- \* CARE ([www.care.org](http://www.care.org))
- \* Catholic Relief Services ([www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org))
- \* International Rescue Committee ([www.theIRC.org](http://www.theIRC.org))
- \* Mercy Corps ([www.mercycorps.org](http://www.mercycorps.org))
- \* Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies ([www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org))
- \* Save the Children ([www.savechildren.org](http://www.savechildren.org))
- \* World Vision ([www.wvi.org](http://www.wvi.org))

The best contributions are those that are in place prior to a disaster because they can be activated immediately.

### How Can I Best Contribute?

There are numerous ways for your company and your employees to contribute at the time of a disaster. Consult with relief agencies, the government, the American Embassy and the US AID Mission to identify areas where you can be actively involved in the relief effort and determine how your company can be integrated into the country's overall disaster response.

To gather more specific information, consider asking the US AID Director or American Ambassador to arrange a meeting or briefing with the head of the U.S.-dispatched team (DART – Disaster Assistance Response Team) that is assessing the extent of the disaster's damage and determining needs.

The best contributions are those that are in place prior to a disaster because they can be activated immediately. Here are some examples for you to consider in discussions with relief agencies.

#### Product Donations

Consider what products your company manufactures, distributes and sells.

- \* How could these products be used to help with relief and recovery efforts?
- \* Where are your products warehoused?
- \* Can they be easily transported to the site of a disaster?
- \* Could supplies be pre-positioned in the event of a disaster?
- \* Does the equipment/product require any special facilities (electrical wiring, cooling, etc.)?

- \* Who will pay for any products donated and which organization(s) will receive them?
- \* Does your company have the capability to re-direct your manufacturing plant to produce items or materials that could be beneficial after a disaster?
- \* Does the equipment require any other products or services to be functional? If so, can you ensure that these are available before making the donation?
- \* If your product requires expertise to install or maintain, be sure that those skills will be available locally, perhaps from your company as a further aid to the relief effort.
- \* If your product includes medicines, be sure your company is familiar with WHO Guidelines for donations that advise on regulatory, dating and labeling issues.



An Acehese Girl Sits in Front of Wrecked Fishing Boats Thursday Feb. 17, 2005 in Banda Aceh. Aceh's Fishing Industry was Almost Completely Wiped Out with About 5,200 Boats Lost.

Photographer: Ed Wray, Associated Press



Workers Rebuild a House which was Destroyed by the Tsunami in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, on the One-Month Anniversary of the Disaster Wednesday, Jan. 26, 2005.

*Photographer: Greg Baker, Associated Press*

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### Expertise

There is a tremendous range of expertise that your employees may have that could be extremely helpful at the time of a disaster and/or in advance of an emergency to strengthen preparedness.

Immediately following a disaster, employees may be able to advise relief workers, provide them with on-the-ground technical assistance, or even take on temporary duties to meet the sudden need for more staff. Before a disaster strikes, companies may be able to offer pro bono consulting and “lend” employees to a relief agency to build its capacity to respond quickly and effectively.

When discussing the types of expertise needed, it is important for companies to understand that relief agencies often have difficulty integrating volunteers into an emergency response.

Companies that are interested in arranging for their employees to volunteer their services should discuss any special training they should receive in advance so they are prepared to help.

Relief agencies have identified the following areas of expertise that are often needed:

- \* Health and medical personnel to provide direct health care services to treat the injured and sick and avoid outbreaks of disease
- \* Water and sanitation engineers to maintain or restore access to clean water
- \* Logisticians who can efficiently manage the procurement, transportation and distribution of essential relief supplies
- \* Information technology experts to set up communications systems, build local area networks and possibly develop specialized software

- \* Construction workers to rebuild damaged homes and buildings
- \* Communications experts to interface with the media and ensure that accurate information about the disaster and its impact is conveyed to both the outside world and to local residents
- \* Public/corporate affairs professionals to help relief agencies navigate the local government, particularly in terms of security issues and avoiding potential scams
- \* Human resource experts to help relief agencies quickly hire local residents and manage an unexpected surge in their workforces. This includes advising on compliance with local labor laws and other regulations

### Less Skilled Labor

In addition to the need for skilled professionals, successful relief operations also depend upon less skilled workers to help with immediate relief activities:

- \* Remove debris using construction equipment
- \* Build latrines
- \* Drive trucks and other vehicles to transport personnel and equipment
- \* Handle cargo at airfields and ports
- \* Interpret the local language
- \* Guard supplies and facilities

### Services and Equipment

Think about your company’s physical assets in or near the affected area and how they can be deployed and modified to help with a relief effort:

- \* Conference rooms for coordination meetings
- \* Offices for aid workers
- \* Warehouses to store supplies and equipment
- \* Vehicles (air, land and sea) for transport of personnel, equipment and supplies
- \* Facilities to maintain and repair vehicles
- \* Computer and telephone equipment
- \* Space for makeshift morgues

### Enlist Your Business Partners

Think broadly about your network of business partners (e.g. trade associations, local customers) and what resources they can provide to strengthen a relief effort. Engage them in discussions with relief agencies to develop a better coordinated response.

- \* What other products do your vendors, suppliers and distributors deal with?
- \* What areas of expertise do they have that could support the relief effort?

Hurricane Survivors Seek Medical Attention  
Along Route 10 near Causway Blvd in  
New Orleans. The Area was a Staging  
Ground for Helicopter Rescues as well  
as Bus and Ambulance Evacuations for  
People Displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

Photographer: John O'Boyle, Star Ledger



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can make is financial.

#### Financial Contributions

One of the most important contributions your company and your employees can make is financial. Cash can be used easily and immediately to purchase whatever is required to help disaster survivors. It is always preferable to buy items locally to support and rebuild the economy, rather than arrange to have them shipped from abroad which is expensive and takes valuable time.

Based on your assessment and recommendation, your corporate headquarters may be making a financial contribution. As the local office in the affected region, you should consider making a contribution as well to a local relief agency – an important statement of your commitment to the community and to your employees.

Country offices can augment their direct financial support in several ways:

- \* Match employees' donations to specific relief agencies through a special matching program

- \* Host fundraising activities at the office
- \* Donate the proceeds from selling certain products
- \* If requested by employees, arrange to donate one or more days' pay to the relief effort
- \* Establish collection sites for cash donations in collaboration with your customers and suppliers
- \* Establish an "employee fund" to which employees can contribute to support directly any employee affected by the disaster
- \* Link your company's Web site to relief organizations to facilitate donations

#### Expectations

As your company makes decisions about what to donate, it is important to manage expectations with relief agencies. Be specific about what your company is offering so the relief agency is prepared to accept the donation and provide the resources required to use it effectively.

For example, make sure to communicate about:

#### Products/Equipment

- \* exact type and pieces of equipment that you will make available
- \* quantity of supplies that you can provide
- \* how the products will be shipped
- \* who will install the equipment
- \* ongoing support to repair equipment

#### Services

- \* exact type and location of services that can be offered
- \* length of time that you will make them available

#### People

- \* scope of work
- \* time commitment of company employees
- \* duration of donation of expertise and/or labor

Country offices can augment their direct financial support in several ways:

Effective communications will enable all parties to make informed decisions about their participation in a coordinated disaster response.



### Reporting

As part of discussions with relief agencies about contributions, it is important to be clear at the outset about your reporting requirements to ensure accountability. It is reasonable to ask relief agencies receiving your cash or in kind contributions to provide information on how the contributions were used. You may want to consult with headquarters about the format and frequency of these reports.

Sri Lankan School Children Listen to a Teacher in a Tent in Galle, Sri Lanka  
Photography: Anuruddha Lokuhapuarachchi, Reuters

### Communications

It is vitally important for you to step up communications to employees, headquarters and the broader community to ensure they are aware of your activities. Effective communications will enable all parties to make informed decisions about their participation in a coordinated disaster response.

#### Employee Communications

Provide frequent updates to your employees through your company's intranet, newsletters, bulletin boards and other regular communications channels on the following:

- \* Well-being of affected employees and their families and the company's support, including financial assistance, help with relocation, job security, etc.

- \* Status of the company's facilities and business network, including manufacturing plants, suppliers, distributors and customers and how the disaster may affect business operations
- \* The company's broader response to the relief effort, including financial and in kind contributions, donations of expertise, personnel and services, leadership in enlisting other businesses, collaboration with the government, etc.
- \* What is appropriate and not appropriate to donate given concerns about non-essential items clogging the transport of critical items to those in need
- \* Discourage the collection and contribution of any used items, especially clothing, materials and medicines

#### Headquarters Communications

- \* Maintain constant contact with headquarters about the severity of the disaster from your first-hand perspective. Employees around the world will be eager to hear directly from you about what is actually happening on the ground, what is truly needed to help survivors and how the company and its employees are responding.

#### External Communications

- \* Work with the media to ensure accuracy in reporting about the toll on the region
- \* Inform other business leaders about your response to encourage their involvement
- \* Make sure that your company's good works are known. Your activities can serve as an important example of how the business community is taking swift action to support relief operations.

Earthquake Survivors Struggle to Survive as Rescue Efforts Continue  
Photography: 56033495, Paula Bronstein, Courtesy of Getty Images



A Pakistani Military Officer Carries a Girl Evacuated from the Earthquake Affected Region of Kashmir.  
Photography: 55883225, Warrick Page, Courtesy of Getty Images

*Following the unprecedented outpouring of corporate contributions after the tsunami, Business Roundtable announced Partnership for Disaster Relief in May 2005. The Partnership is an effort to expand corporate commitment – beyond financial contributions – to respond to natural disasters. The Partnership aims to bring together the resources and expertise of the private sector to enhance and accelerate on-the-ground relief and recovery activities following major natural disasters in the United States and abroad.*

*Business Roundtable is an association of chief executive officers of leading corporations with a combined workforce of more than 10 million employees and \$4.5 trillion in annual revenues. The chief executives are committed to advocating public policies that foster vigorous economic growth and a dynamic global economy.*







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