

**Recovery Tabletop Exercise**

**September 24, 2014**

**AFTER ACTION REPORT**

**Publication Date: October 16, 2014**

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## HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to analyze notes and feedback forms from the exercise, identify capabilities to be maintained and built upon, identify potential areas for further improvement, and make recommendations for future exercises.

### Introduction

The Broome County COAD Recovery Tabletop Exercise was developed to better understand the capabilities and needs of community organizations during a disaster recovery phase in and around Broome County, NY. The exercise planning team was composed of numerous and diverse agencies, including Broome County COAD, the Broome County Office of Emergency Services, the Broome County Planning Department, Binghamton University, Broome County Council of Churches, United Way of Broome County, the Southern Tier Chapter of the American Red Cross, and WSKG. The exercise planning team met biweekly from June to August and weekly in September leading up to the exercise. The planning team discussed the scope and magnitude of the disaster scenario, the types of organizations and agencies to invite, the exercise design and event logistics. Based on the exercise planning team's deliberations, the following objectives were developed for the Recovery Tabletop Exercise:

1. To learn from each participating organization how they can assist in the short and long-term recovery from a disaster.
2. To identify the gaps in service provision during disaster and identify the improvement process for filling those gaps.
3. To develop a framework of an emergency plan for COAD during short and long-term recovery.

### Capabilities & Needs

The exercise was attended by a total of 84 people, comprising 56 individual organizations. Overall, the exercise was successful in meeting two out of three of its objectives. Broome County COAD learned from each participating organization what they can do to assist during a disaster recovery as well as the gaps in service provision during several different timeframes of recovery. The exercise did not directly result in developing a framework for a COAD recovery plan, but it will help in developing such a framework. Subsequent exercises should be similarly focused on disaster recovery, and should go more in-depth into each organization and agency's role in the recovery process.

The major strengths identified during this exercise are as follows:

- There are many organizations across Broome County that provide volunteers during disaster recovery.
  - The 211 call center is a reliable source of information and plays an integral role in disaster recovery.
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- There is strong and established coordination and cooperation among several organizations that are ready to assist during disaster recovery.

Throughout the exercise, several opportunities for improvement were identified in the ability to recover from the scenario. The primary areas for improvement are as follows:

- Communication of vital information both to the public and amongst groups in the community could be improved.
  - There is a limited availability of reliable and appropriate housing for flood victims.
  - Flood victims need more assistance navigating through the FEMA process.
  - There needs to be continuous media coverage reporting throughout all stages of the disaster recovery process.
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## SECTION 1: EXERCISE OVERVIEW

### Exercise Details

**Exercise Name**

Recovery Tabletop Exercise

**Type of Exercise**

Tabletop

**Exercise Start Date**

September 24, 2014

**Exercise End Date**

September 24, 2014

**Duration**

3 hours

**Location**

Nimmonsburg United Methodist Church, 918 Upper Front St., Binghamton, NY 13905

**Sponsor**

Broome County Community Organizations Active in Disaster, Inc. (POC: Shelbi DuBord)

**Mission**

Recovery

**Scenario Type**

Flood

### Exercise Planning Team

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**Number of Participants**

- Total Attended: 84
- Total Participating Organizations: 56
- Players: 73
- Facilitators: 2
- Volunteer Notetakers: 6
- Event Organizers: 3



## SECTION 2: EXERCISE DESIGN SUMMARY

### Exercise Purpose and Design

The purpose of this exercise is to bring together community organizations who have experience or interest in disaster recovery to discuss the needs and their capabilities during a disaster event. Each organization was placed in a functional group that focused on the issues and capabilities their organizations have experience with.

The exercise was designed by the Tabletop Exercise Planning Committee who worked diligently and collaboratively to produce an exercise that would provide community organizations with an opportunity to identify gaps and solutions during the several stages of disaster recovery. These discussions were meant to foster critical thinking and problem solving discussions, while also building collaborative relationships between the organizations.

### Exercise Objectives, Capabilities, and Activities

Broome County COAD seeks to streamline the effort in building a coordinated network of volunteer and local organizations by hosting events like the Tabletop exercise in the community that focus on preparedness and recovery. This exercise was an essential piece in the process of developing that network. More importantly, this report will lay the foundation for a strategic plan on how community organizations will function during the recovery of a disaster.

- **Objective 1:** To learn from each participating organization how they can assist in the short and long-term recovery from a disaster.
- **Objective 2:** To identify the gaps in service provision during disaster and identify the improvement process for filling those gaps.
- **Objective 3:** To develop a framework of an emergency plan for COAD during short and long-term recovery.

### Scenario Summary

Early in the morning of March 15th, the National Weather Service Doppler radar indicates that tropical storms producing heavy rainfall and damaging winds in excess of 60 mph are headed towards the county. By 9:00 a.m. that day, runoff from the heavy rain begins to flood low-lying areas in Broome County. Rain continues through mid-afternoon on March 16th, all rivers in the county have crested, causing a record amount of flooding.

In total, 16 inches of rain fell within 48 hours, resulting in all of the watersheds to spill over. In the Broome County area, about 26,000 residents have been ordered to evacuate. The total number of damaged structures in Broome County reached 8,000. In addition, 5,000 structures were without electric and natural gas leaving residents to battle the cold weather conditions without basic utilities. 12 local organizations experienced damage to their locations that were beyond repair, leaving them only to move or rebuild. There was damage to multiple water systems with 450 private wells contaminated. The mucking out process will now become

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increasingly challenging due to the impending colder weather.

## **SECTION 3: RECURRENT THEMES**

Based on an analysis of the table notes, several themes appeared during the tabletop discussions. Below is a brief list of those themes, which will be discussed in greater detail in Section 4.

### **Housing**

- Sheltering for special needs (families, pets, disabled)
- Finding long term housing
- Transitional housing

### **Communication**

- Publicizing events & victims stories throughout all stages
- Public awareness of available programs (FEMA, disaster assistance programs)

### **Legal**

- Assistance filling out FEMA forms
- Legal assistance with home repairs
- Insurance claim mediation

### **Human Services**

- Individuals with special needs
- Locating clients and medications
- Mental health issues
- Counseling for depression

### **Volunteers**

- Use of spontaneous volunteers
- Volunteer housing for mobile volunteers

### **Rebuilding**

- Home assessments
- Oversight of rebuilding process to prevent scams, stealing of materials, misuse of funds
- Fraud by contractors

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## SECTION 4: ANALYSIS BY FUNCTION

This section of the report discusses the capabilities and needs within several functional areas that arose during the exercise. Each function includes an analysis of the major capabilities and needs, and recommendations for improvement.

### Function 1: Communication

**Summary:** Communication was a recurrent theme throughout the exercise, with major areas of need surrounding public awareness of available services, clear lines of communication between coordinating agencies and media outlets, and greater public awareness of available services. There is a strong existing relationship between County and Local officials and the 211 call center services, which provide reliable, up-to-date information to the public.

#### Capability 1.1: 211 Call Center

**Analysis:** There is a well-established and experienced 211 call center that provides reliable, up-to-date information to the public. 211 has an agreement with the County to provide services during disasters and assist in overflow calls from the 911 call center.

**Recommendations:** Continue to support and promote 211 as a source for free, reliable information.

#### Capability 1.2: Public broadcasting of reliable information

**Analysis:** There is a well-established network of media outlets across Broome County that broadcast reliable information, including radio, TV, and newspaper.

**Recommendations:** Media outlets such as WSKG can broadcast information from 211 to the public. Media should continue to emphasize the recovery process even after the first few months have passed. There is a need for continuous, reliable information to be shared with the public regarding road closures, available service, disaster assistance programs, etc. throughout the duration of the disaster recovery phase.

#### Need 1.1: Greater public awareness of available programs and services

**Analysis:** Flood victims are often unaware of the services available to them during the recovery of a disaster.

**Recommendations:** Hold town hall meetings during disaster recovery to provide the public with accurate and detailed information on how they can seek the appropriate assistance. Promote the use of 211 as a free, reliable source of information.

#### Need 1.2: Keep the community interested and actively engaged in recovery

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**Analysis:** Public interest in the disaster recovery wanes after the first few months, and the community forgets that there still is a need for recovery. It becomes harder to retain volunteers, fundraise, and provide relief to victims of disaster.

**Recommendations:** Encourage the media to publicize the stories of disaster victims while also publicizing the success of organizations assisting victims.

## Function 2: Coordination

**Summary:** Coordination is an integral part of the disaster recovery process. There is a strong network within Broome County capable of coordinating their actions to solve the problems that arise after a disaster event. Broome County COAD can help strengthen existing relationships and forge new ones.

### Capability 2.1: Functioning COAD

**Analysis:** The COAD is a strong organization that has a good grasp of the concerns, issues, difficulties and needs during disaster recovery.

**Recommendations:** During a disaster, form a Disaster Recovery subcommittee under COAD leadership.

### Capability 2.2: Round table coordination

**Analysis:** Allocation of disaster funds has been done through a facilitated round table that functioned appropriately to solve problems. The round table was led by Broome County COAD and consisted of representatives from several community organizations.

**Recommendations:** Continue to support and build the capacity of the round table coordination through the development of policies and procedures.

### Need 2.1: Central Coordination for services and information on funding

**Analysis:** There is a need for a central point of contact that guides individuals to the appropriate place for funding.

**Recommendations:** Create a central point of contact for information on funding and how to obtain that funding. This central organization will assist with the long term recovery through the entire process.

### Need 2.2: Case management services and funding

**Analysis:** There is a need to provide more long term case management services and funding during all stages of disaster recovery.

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**Recommendations:** Provide case management funding up to 2 years after disaster event. There also needs to be a debriefing process for case workers.

**Function 3: Food Resources**

**Summary:** Food and water are important resources during all stages of recovery. They are essential in the immediate aftermath when shelters are operating and need to feed displaced victims. In the later stages we also see a strong need for this resource when unemployment has increased and families begin utilizing food banks.

**Capability 3.1: Providing food & water to victims**

**Analysis:** Organizations such as the Red Cross, CHOW and the Food Bank of the Southern Tier can provide food resources to those in need. In order to ensure the safety and security of food resources, the Food Bank of the Southern Tier can provide a refrigerated food truck.

**Recommendations:** Continue to support and promote existing food resources. Educate the public about the variety of food resources in our community.

**Need 3.1: Food and water resources**

**Analysis:** During some disasters, food and water resources may either be damaged or exhausted in Broome County.

**Recommendations:** In the event that Broome County lacks the necessary resources, create agreements to source food and water resources from other Counties and municipalities.

**Function 4: Health and human Services**

**Summary:** Much of the health and human services discussions revolved around the topic of individuals with disabilities and special needs. In Broome County there is a great need for mental health services. During the aftermath of a disaster event it is extremely important to consider the impact of recovery on an individual's mental state.

**Capability 4.1: Medications & medical equipment**

**Analysis:** Individuals on medications must have an adequate supply to sustain them in the early stages of disaster. The Southern Tier Independence Center (STIC) serves some individuals who use Medicaid, but not all. Medicaid Service Coordinators and peer counselors will follow up with their own consumers, but would not have access to the vast numbers of people who are eligible and receive Medicaid in the County. STIC can

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also provide extra equipment: wheelchairs, walkers and other equipment to Medicaid patients.

**Recommendations:** Provide education about STIC and other resources to individuals with special needs. Remind individuals on medications to pack accordingly and have a plan in place to have an emergency supply. Work with the Department of Health to better understand the County's true capacity to provide medications and medical equipment in the aftermath of a disaster.

### Capability 4.2: Finding housing/employment for disabled

**Analysis:** Individuals with disabilities who experience the loss of a home or job will need assistance in finding new housing and employment. STIC can assist with locating both of these.

**Recommendations:** Provide education about STIC and other resources to individuals with special needs.

### Capability 4.3: Mental Health Counseling

**Analysis:** During the several stages of recovery the community will experience emotional and physical stress due to the disaster event. There are organizations in the community such as the Veterans Center, STIC, and faith-based groups that can provide counseling to both at-risk and non-risk populations. Broome County CASA can provide health assessments for clients returning home.

**Recommendations:** Support and promote organizations that provide mental health counseling.

### Need 4.1: Procedure for mentally ill and disabled population

**Analysis:** Mental health services are lacking in the County.

**Recommendations:** Develop a plan to increase the mental health services available during disaster, possibly through agreements with other Counties and municipalities.

## Function 5: Housing

**Summary:** Housing was one of the most cited topics during the tabletop exercise. Discussions ranged from the need to provide special needs shelters to helping individuals find transitional housing. The County has a strong community of non-profit and faith-organizations that can assist with muck outs and home repair, but there is a lack of adequate housing options for disaster victims.

### Capability 5.1: Mucking out of homes

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**Analysis:** Faith-based groups can provide equipment and volunteers that will begin the mucking out process.

**Recommendations:** Continue to source volunteers to keep the process going long into the late stages of disaster recovery.

### Capability 5.2: Oversight of rebuilding

**Analysis:** Oversight can be provided by organizations such as Opportunities for Chenango and the home building association.

**Recommendations:** Seek out additional resources for oversight of construction work.

### Need 5.1: Reliable and special needs shelters

**Analysis:** There are many individuals within the area that require special needs shelters or housing. This includes special considerations for those with disabilities or individuals with pets.

**Recommendations:** Develop plans for handicap accessible shelters, pet-friendly shelters, and other shelters that can accommodate individuals with special needs.

### Need 5.2: Transitional and long term housing

**Analysis:** A process is needed to transition disaster victims whose homes are destroyed from shelters into long term housing. The problem goes deeper than just locating long-term housing, because there is a severe lack of affordable housing units in the area.

**Recommendations:** Develop plans and agreements to house disaster victims in surrounding Counties and municipalities, even as far away as Syracuse. Develop new affordable housing units to mitigate long-term housing problem in the future.

## Function 6: Legal Services

**Summary:** Legal services are needed for various functions during the several stages of disaster recovery. Beginning with advising flood victims on how to fill out forms to representing victims of fraud. Several legal organizations can provide free services to victims of the disaster.

### Capability 6.1: Free Legal Services

**Analysis:** The Broome Bar Association provides free legal services during disaster recovery, including educating flood victims on how to fill out FEMA forms. ACCORD provides mediation for disaster victims and insurance agencies, landlords, etc.

**Recommendations:** Legal agencies could seek to partner more closely with FEMA to

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provide more in-depth information on the procedures and protocols for obtaining resources.

### Capability 6.2: Help with consumer issues

**Analysis:** The NYS Attorney General can provide assistance to homeowners repairing their homes from damage.

**Recommendations:** Educate the public about this resource by including it in press releases, town hall meetings, and broadcasting on the radio.

### Need 6.1: Safeguards against scams

**Analysis:** During previous disasters, scams from contractors occurred during the rebuilding process.

**Recommendations:** The Broome Bar Association should seek out volunteer lawyers to represent victims of fraud.

### Need 6.2: Legal assistance with rebuilding process

**Analysis:** Several services are needed during the rebuilding process, this includes: training victims to fill out forms, legal assistance with home repair, and case management services.

**Recommendations:** Utilize free legal services from the Broome Bar Association, help from the NYS Attorney General, and case management from ACCORD.

## Function 7: Volunteer Management

**Summary:** The exercise highlighted that volunteers are needed in every stage of disaster recovery. They are important for the mucking out of houses, rebuilding of homes, case management, and several other functions. Volunteer organizations must be able to retain volunteers even after the initial stages by keeping them engaged and interested in volunteering.

### Capability 7.1: Human resources and administration

**Analysis:** Adversarial relationships between workers and volunteers may be present during disaster recovery.

**Recommendations:** Broome County Council of churches can provide HR and administration support to deal with these issues. Each group handling volunteers should have a system to deal with conflict between volunteers.

### Capability 7.2: Volunteers both local and mobile

**Analysis:** There is a strong need for many volunteers throughout all stages of disaster recovery. Both local and mobile volunteers are needed to ensure a successful recovery. Students from Binghamton University and Davis, Veterans from the Vet Center, and volunteers from several churches can provide local volunteers. Presbyterian and NY United can send in teams of volunteers to give emotional and spiritual support. American legion can provide mobile volunteers.

**Recommendations:** Continue to utilize both local and mobile volunteers.

### Need 7.1: Volunteer Coordination

**Analysis:** During the early stages of disaster recovery, spontaneous volunteers presented themselves to organizations trying to help. These volunteers overwhelmed the capacity of the organizations to coordinate their efforts and resulted in organizations turning volunteers away, and unhappy, unutilized volunteers.

**Recommendations:** Develop a plan for a Volunteer Reception Center, led by Broome County COAD, to coordinate, screen, and place spontaneous volunteers with appropriate agencies.

### Need 7.2: Volunteer housing

**Analysis:** There is a strong need for volunteer housing for individuals coming from outside of the county.

**Recommendations:** Develop agreements with churches to provide temporary shelters for outside volunteers.

### Need 7.3: Skilled volunteers

**Analysis:** Skilled volunteers are needed across the board for things like case management, construction, debris removal, legal, plumbing, electricians, etc.

**Recommendations:** Continue to promote the Governor's skilled volunteer initiative.

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## SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

The tabletop exercise provided great insight into the needs and capabilities that exist in Broome County during the recovery phase of a disaster. Many topics were discussed and recommendations made during the group discussions. The exercise was helpful in outlining what specific services organizations and agencies can provide during the recovery of a disaster. Similarly, the exercise was successful in identifying areas of need such as sharing information, publicizing stories of disaster victims, and assistance with filling out FEMA forms. It also helped us realize that we have a very strong and capable network of organizations ready to coordinate and share resources, along with a ready and willing community of volunteers to support our community organizations.

This report was compiled using the notes each group took during the exercise as well as feedback forms filled out by participants. The exercise was a collaborative effort by every participant that attended and we thank everyone for their constructive discussions and feedback. This report will aid us in drafting an emergency plan for Broome County COAD, and will help us determine how to work with community organizations during the recovery of a disaster. Our next steps will be to create a **directory of organizations capable of providing services during disasters**. This directory will include organizations that attended and several more that have a role in disaster recovery. Ultimately, it is our goal to create a network of capable organizations filling in the gaps that exist during the aftermath of a disaster. We may be contacting you for more information about the services your organization can provide. If you would like to assist in the development of a directory, please feel free to reach out to us with any suggestions.

It is imperative that we continue to support efforts in Broome County and surrounding areas to help prepare for disaster events like the ones we have faced in the past. This will only be achieved by building relationships within our community and working together. If there is anything that we missed in this report that you feel would be beneficial to future exercises or discussions, please feel free to send the feedback to Shelbi DuBord, Broome County COAD Executive Director at [sdubord@bccoad.org](mailto:sdubord@bccoad.org).

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## APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Total Survey Responses: 64

Average Years in Position	PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND				
	0	1-5	5-10	15+	No response
Number of Exercises Previously Participated in	40.6%	28.1%	17.2%	9.4%	4.7%

*The following statements were rated 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree.*

PERCENT THAT AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED (Ratings of 4 or 5)

<b>Communication from event organizers was informative and provided the necessary information for my role in the exercise.</b>	90.6%
<b>The exercise scenario was plausible and realistic.</b>	95.3%
<b>Exercise participants included the right people in terms of level and mix of disciplines.</b>	84.4%
<b>Participants were actively involved in the exercise.</b>	93.8%
<b>Exercise participation was appropriate for someone in my fields with my level of experience/training.</b>	85.9%
<b>The exercise provided the opportunity to address significant decisions in support of critical recovery areas.</b>	79.7%
<b>After this exercise, I better understand how participating organizations can assist in the short and long-term recovery from a disaster.</b>	85.9%
<b>I would be interested in attending another exercise like this.</b>	89.1%