

SBA, Volunteer Groups and FEMA Come to the Aid of Flood Survivors

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AUSTIN, Texas – When disaster strikes, many people think they have only FEMA to help them recover. But in fact FEMA is only one of myriad agencies and organizations ready to provide assistance to those affected by calamities, both natural and manmade.

Since the severe storms and flooding engulfed Hidalgo, Cameron and Jim Wells counties in June and July, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), volunteer groups, and FEMA have all worked together to help survivors get back on their feet.

Through federal low-interest disaster loans, SBA assists businesses of all sizes along with

nonprofit organizations, along with homeowners and renters who might be referred to SBA by FEMA. Indeed, disaster loans are the primary source of money to pay for repair or replacement of property not fully covered by insurance or other compensation. To date, SBA has approved 293 loans to survivors in the three counties totaling \$11,573,200.

At least 20 volunteer organizations responded to the Rio Grande Valley flooding. These organizations helped ease the amount of work required to bounce back, often doing the “heavy lifting,” like mucking out dwellings, removing water-damaged sheetrock, and cleaning up houses.



Organizations like Team Rubicon responded shortly after the storms and flooding on “Operation Magic Valley,” starting work on June 25 and completing operations on July 23. Team Rubicon reports that 216 volunteers participated in the work in Hidalgo County, equating to 12,948 man hours and an estimated total in cost saving of \$373,600.

Local churches like the First Baptist Church of Weslaco opened a shelter for survivors shortly after the flooding, providing them with a secure place to live while work on their homes was completed. The church helped muck out and clean up more than 160 houses, and the work is ongoing.

Samaritan’s Purse responded with 383 volunteers and completed the mucking and gutting of 178 homes, totaling 11,872 volunteer hours.

Often one of the first organizations to respond, the American Red Cross responded by deploying more than 200 volunteers to the Rio Grande Valley, served more than 29,000 meals and snacks and distributed more than 13,000 relief items to survivors. The American Red Cross continues their work, focusing on long term recovery and preparedness.

The Well Church of Mercedes provided more than 350 families with food, personal items and household cleaning supplies, and organized teams of volunteers to help muck out and clean houses.

During times of disaster, federal agencies like AmeriCorps provide key resources that help expand the capacity of existing organizations by deploying teams to help with work ranging from mucking, gutting and cleanup to community outreach and capacity building by providing support to Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. AmeriCorps responded in force by deploying 41 disaster relief teams to



the Rio Grande Valley including conservation corps teams from Louisiana, New Mexico and Texas. Since deploying, teams have cleared over 183 cubic yards of debris and mucked and gutted over 30 homes with work continuing.

Recovery from a disaster is a long-term process, often lasting years. Volunteer, non-profit organizations like the Catholic Charities are there for the long run. Catholic Charities, a part of the Long Term Recovery Committee, manages case work and provides funding for repair work for those community members who need more assistance than what FEMA or SBA can provide.

Without organizations like Team Rubicon, Samaritan's Purse, American Red Cross, the countless churches and religious organizations like the First Baptist Church of Weslaco and the Well Church of Mercedes, it would be much harder for survivors of disasters like this one to return to a normal life.

To date, over 5,300 survivors have visited a disaster recovery center to meet with FEMA, SBA, state and other resources. In excess of \$26 million has been dispersed through the Individuals and Households Program; and, more than \$21 million has been distributed for housing assistance.

Survivors looking for help for cleanout, furniture moving and rebuilding can call 2-1-1 or (877) 541-7905. 2-1-1 can connect survivors with up-to-date information about the resources available to them in their areas.

Survivors who are still without a home that is safe, secure and functional and have not registered with FEMA, need to do so before Sept. 4, 2018. Federal disaster assistance is available for homeowners and renters.



For more information on volunteer organizations involved in the Texas disaster recovery, visit <https://txvoad.communityos.org/cms/node/104>.



FEMA

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