

Disaster Best Practices — Member Communications

A guide to member communications during a disaster

Overview

A typical relief appeal is best served by a central body to facilitate program coordination, member partner logistics and recipient partner funding and communication. The central body acts as the umbrella organization for member-partners on behalf of the region's credit union/cooperative movement and as the movement's agent to fund and liaise with the nominated relief appeal recipient.

The central body could be a movement's development agency, such as CUFA for Australian credit unions and mutual building societies, or a nominated credit union with the capacity to deliver and support such a program.

Member-partners are credit unions and other co-ops that promote appeals to their membership and broader communities, directing donors to collection points (online appeal fundraising website, credit union/co-op branch and outlets) and providing a public face to the appeal.

This strategy provides a clear delegation of roles and responsibilities so that appeals can be rapidly actioned and professionally delivered, ensuring that positive public perception of the sector is achieved or enhanced, and the donor experience is easy and positive.

Appeal program setup

Goal: Ability to launch and rollout a fully prepared relief appeal within one to two days

Establish a formal framework to support on-demand appeal events, including:

- Formal legal authority to fundraise for disaster relief
- Trust and fund account vehicles
- Project plan
- Appeal services website for online donation, partner support and service delivery
- Project awareness strategy so partners are prepared and on standby to act quickly
- Crisis engagement and delivery strategy (tools, materials and systems)
- Partner communication tools and strategy (effective broadcast to gain appeal partners, quickly reach consensus decisions during appeal and advise transition phases)

Appeal rollout

Goal: Ability to quickly setup and resource appeal partners

Make sure everyone is on the same page by obtaining:

- Central body program preparation confirmation
- Central body program duration confirmation (typically six to eight weeks minimum)
- Central body recipient partner confirmation
- Initial call for partners. Target CEO and marketing staff to ensure the message gets out. Conduct generic and targeted communications. Release bulletins and special newsletters. Send invitation to participate by e-mail and letter.
- Receive participation and contacts' expression of interest and confirmation (online engagement, phone and e-mail channels)
- Confirm basis, practice, logistics and legal issues per partner. Each partner should operate within their capacity and not over-commit resources!
- Enable resources for each partner
- Partners commence preparation, promotion and collection points. Use a phased approach: immediately link to online donation services, then promote and provide collection support)

Appeal delivery

Goal: Provide support to appeal partners

Provide communications including:

- Real-time public fundraising progress total
- On-the-ground imagery and bulletins as soon as possible
- Partner reports as soon as possible
- Support partner use of tools and services for them to regularly remit appeal funds raised
- Set agreements including:
 - Support partners provide funds to central partner in installments and manage reporting and accountability of their related activities.
 - Central body provides funds to recipient partners in installments and manages reporting and accountability of those activities.

Appeal extension

Public support of an appeal may be slow to gain momentum, or the disaster impact itself grows; so it may be necessary to extend an appeal.

Partner exit

A credit union or co-op may choose to finish its activities before the official appeal has been finalized, completing their relevant completion tasks and confirmations.

Appeal completion

Typically, an appeal is complete when the recipient partner signals that relief funds raised are sufficient to meet relief needs, and where rehabilitation has been achieved.

The central body communicates this to partners and makes arrangements with each to finalize promotion, referrals and collections.

Close engagement services

Partners balance accounts and provide collection point receipts for central body records and reconciliation.

The central body updates the website and support materials to post-appeal phase, removes the fundraising facility and checks in with each partner to do the same or filters any residual inquiry/donation to an alternative appeal or third party, such as the Red Cross.

The central body arranges and conducts a formal handover event with recipient partners as appropriate, involving media to highlight the co-op sector's response and support of the crisis to assist those in urgent need.

Post event

The central body will regularly seek progress updates for the recipient partner and post this information on the appeal website, broadcasting updates to appeal partners, who in turn would communicate this to their membership and community.

Finalization

All parties having ceased promotion of the fundraising aspects of the appeal, downgrading urgency of access to information and material and providing appeal information and reports for ongoing transparency, information and historical purposes.