Disaster Recovery Checklist for Public Officials

http://egov.oregon.gov/OOHS/OEM/docs/financial/disaster_recovery_checklist_public_officials_v1.pdf

[Note: This checklist from the State of Oregon Emergency Mangement web site (http://egov.oregon.gov/OOHS/OEM/) is one of many helpful documents there. It may not fit exactly into a state's statutory framework and should be reviewed and appropriately altered before adoption and implementation. It does provide some ideas for topics to consider as part of disaster preparation, management and recovery. "LEPM" is a local emergency planning official in Oregon.]

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER TAKING BEFORE THE DISASTER...

- Keep a copy of this checklist handy; incrementally work on its implementation.

- "Brainstorm" with your LEPM to determine which departments and individuals have a disaster recovery role. Then work with your LEPM to develop (or refine an existing) recovery organizational model. This model can be expanded into a recovery plan. At a minimum, the organizational model should include a list of personnel and their roles and responsibilities post-disaster. Some local jurisdictions in Oregon already have a recovery plan; if your jurisdiction does, review it and work with your LEPM to improve it.

- Impact and damage assessments will be a *huge* job during and immediately following the disaster; work with your LEPM to designate a person to take the lead on these assessments, and to organize and train the needed teams in advance. Have trained alternates for members of the teams, and for their leader (the impact and damage assessment coordinator). The LEPM may or may not be the best person for the job of coordinating these teams. There are many factors in favor of the LEPM, but those not in favor are the fact that this work may occur while response is still underway, or may occur after days of very little rest for the LEPM and his or her staff.

- Talk with your legal counsel, LEPM, and others about the extent to which the jurisdiction has ordinances in place which will facilitate recovery. Examples might include ordinances regarding disaster area security such as restricting entry and curfew, debris removal, condemnation, streamlining permit processes to the extent allowed by law, waiving permit fees, etc.

- Talk with legal counsel, LEPM, public works, and others regarding the extent to which the jurisdiction has codes and standards in place which require that buildings and infrastructure built or repaired postdisaster are built in a more disaster resistant way. FEMA's infrastructure repair program ("Public Assistance") can participate in the funding of rebuilding public facilities to a higher standard in some circumstances.

- Talk with your LEPM and other public safety officials to determine whether additional cooperative assistance agreements (ORS Chapter 401. 480) are needed with neighboring jurisdictions. These agreements can provide many resources to assist with recovery, including building officials. These agreements may also provide well-rested people with needed expertise who can give your exhausted staff an opportunity to get some needed rest. Disaster recovery typically begins while disaster response is still underway, and can last weeks, months, or years. Prepare for the long haul.

- Have your LEPM participate in Oregon Emergency Management's Disaster Recovery and Mitigation Course (DRMC) the next time it is offered... if your LEPM hasn't taken this course recently (he or she may have).

- Identify and train your key accounting and finance staff in the documentation requirements of disaster recovery programs.

- People will want to return to their damaged buildings after the event. In some cases, for their own safety, they should not be allowed to, or should be allowed to only under certain conditions. Learn from your lead building official what procedures are in place for restricting access to, and for the post-disaster safety evaluation and posting of buildings.

- Have your building officials take the class "ATC-20," which provides training on the post-disaster safety evaluation of buildings. ATC is Applied Technology Council. The ATC-20 process includes a well accepted process for "tagging" buildings with the following designations; "inspected" (green tag), "restricted use" (yellow tag), and "unsafe" (red tag). Have sufficient copies of the ATC-20 placards (tags) printed and widely distributed throughout the jurisdiction prior to the event: you may not be able to make color copies after the event, and you may not be able to enter the building officials office. Some jurisdictions have building officials store these placards at their homes. See... www.atcouncil.org/reports.htm\

- Work with your LEPM and others to develop a strategy for effectively using volunteers post-disaster. Your community will find itself with both organized volunteers (e.g., the American Red Cross and similar organizations) and "emergent" volunteers. Poorly managed, emergent volunteers will be ineffective, probably time-consuming, and possibly a liability. Well managed, they may be an asset in recovery. Have a pre-designated volunteer coordinator, and a plan to screen and assign volunteers who approach local government with offers of assistance following a disaster.

- Likewise, work with your LEPM before the disaster to develop a plan for the management of donated goods, which can become a huge problem rather than a potential asset. Related: if private monetary donations are made to your jurisdiction, do you have a mechanism for accepting them? OEM has written guidance available on development of donated goods plans.

- Engage your land use planners in a discussion about community redevelopment post-disaster. While having a disaster is awful, stressful, damaging, even devastating; disaster recovery oftentimes does provide a community with an opportunity to re-build in a safer, less hazardous way. (Even better, of course, is hazard mitigation planning and implementation prior to the disaster!)

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER TAKING AFTER THE DISASTER.

- If you have not already done so, consider designating a person to coordinate the jurisdiction's recovery. Depending on the organization of your jurisdiction, needed skills, training, workload, and other factors, this may or may not be the Local Emergency Program Manager (LEPM). Examples: in Washington County following the flood and landslides of February 1996, the recovery manager worked for the Department of Land Use and Transportation; in Crook County and Prineville following the May and June 1998 flood, these two jurisdictions jointly hired a private sector consultant to manage the recovery for both jurisdictions.

- Impress upon your managers and staff that they may not be able to go back to doing their "normal" jobs for a long time. Sometimes people think that when the "response" is over, the disaster is over. This is seldom, if ever true. Prepare your people for the long haul.

- Related to the above: take care of your staff. Some of your staff or their families may have been directly impacted by the event. Some of your staff will try to work too many hours or without proper meals and breaks. Some of your staff will eventually face burnout, and possibly physical and/or mental health effects from stress and lack of rest or proper nutrition. Counseling can be made available for both disaster victims and disaster workers. Make sure your managers and staff take a day or two off every once in a while during disaster recovery. Consider establishing regular meetings with your key staff to discuss the current day's events and the day ahead.

- Begin documentation and financial record-keeping immediately; have accounting and finance staff involved in disaster recovery as soon as possible. You may want to establish a recovery committee consisting not only of the involved government agencies, but also some representatives of key outside organizations to guide overall policy and recovery decisions. It may be helpful to modify or expand an existing structure to provide continuity. If you establish such a committee, clearly define its authority and responsibilities, and whom it takes direction from and reports to.

- Identify a volunteer staging area where people can be screened, trained, and assigned to assistance roles. See also the notes on volunteer coordination above.

- Assess the kinds of donated goods that are needed and issue a press release describing them; state a preference for money and indicate the organizations that can use it. Establish a warehouse for receiving, sorting, and disbursing donated goods. Decide how to distribute donated funds and/or goods. Set-up a coalition of voluntary organization leaders (or - better yet - tab into an existing one) to decide who is most in need and what kinds of needs will be your highest priority. Also the notes on donated goods above.

- Coordinate the work of your public information officers (PIOs) to avoid conflicting information (this may only apply in jurisdictions with large staffs). Consider establishing an information "hotline" regarding office closures, relocations, new hours, and so on. Also keep this information updated on your website.

- Do a series of outreach efforts devoted to a single topic, e.g., insurance, mental health, erosion control, the permitting and rebuilding process, etc. These may be covered in a multimedia way such as local newspapers, community access television, website, etc. Via newspapers and your website, publish a list of recovery resource telephone numbers.

- During recovery efforts for which federal resources are being made available (FEMA, SBA, etc.) and in which there are many individuals and families impacted by the event, if you are concerned that other outreach efforts aren't working or won't work, consider asking OEM to work with you to set-up disaster recovery centers (DRC).

- In addition to the federal agencies providing information at these centers, other organizations involved in recovery can provide information; e.g., voluntary agencies, your departments such as planning/development, building, and health departments, organizations providing crisis counseling or legal assistance, etc.

- Following catastrophic disasters (for example, a large earthquake), some people may assume new roles; for example, property owners with no previous development experience may suddenly try to become developers; or alternatively, a jurisdiction with a regulatory orientation towards development may find itself needing to court and solicit new development. The process of recovery may uncover philosophical difference about the "proper roles" of the private and public sectors in rebuilding; development of a common understanding may be needed before moving forward. Keep in mind that the major recovery decisions hinge on the choice between trying to recreate the jurisdiction as it was, or recognizing the inevitability of change and managing it to create a safer community; a disaster resistant community.

- Be prepared to respond to media requests for updated information prior to important anniversaries; six months, one year, and so on.