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A Case Study of Organizational Mobilization Best Practices for Natural Disasters

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The signatures of the individuals below indicate that they have read and approved the project of Jaclyn Ermoyan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Innovation.

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Abstract

Researching mobilization best practices for natural disasters has concluded that volunteers respond best to having meaning behind the work that they do and when they are involved at all levels of the service they are doing. After interviewing a representative from the American Red Cross and a representative from Team Rubicon, it is clear that having a local focus leads to successful mobilization practices. Both organizations are able to move quickly and innovate because of their understanding that all disasters are different. The two organizations focus on training their volunteers and having various deployment requirements. According to this research, technology can be both a strength and a weakness for disaster response organizations. Further research is needed to best determine which technologies should be used and how these barriers can be overcome.

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Research Question: How can disaster relief organizations better mobilize volunteers to respond to natural disasters?

Goals: Add research to the field of volunteer mobilization in disaster relief and provide data to organizations that can improve volunteer mobilization in disaster relief.

Objectives: The research will draw conclusions on how organizations can best mobilize volunteers in a disaster setting. The information collected will be provided to Team Rubicon and the American Red Cross to better inform their disaster mobilization practices.

Literature Review:

Organizational Mobilization Best Practices for Natural Disasters

When natural disasters occur, every second counts to save lives and minimize damage. The natural disaster industry has evolved greatly over the past few decades with the increase of disaster occurrences. This essay will focus on the history of disaster relief, why it is important, and how business, nonprofit, and government sectors are involved. From there, the essay will discuss the history of volunteer mobilization. In sum, the essay will draw comparisons between the ways in which disaster relief organizations can best mobilize volunteers in order to respond to natural disasters. These comparisons will be made through the application and analysis of theories of social innovation.

Why studying disasters is important

To begin, natural disasters can greatly impact and disrupt the lives of those who are affected by them. Natural disasters can include wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados, and tsunamis. According to research done by Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, the people who are most likely to die as a result of natural disasters are the people who are the poorest. This is due to the lack of resources and investment in infrastructure for those who live in lower income areas (Ritchie and Roser, 2014, p. 1). The social inequities that exist in society is demonstrated by the fact that the poorest populations are most at-risk of death by natural disasters. Their research goes on to explain that an average of 60,000 people per year die from natural disasters globally (Ritchie and Roser, 2014, p. 1). With global warming causing the climate to change, there is an intense need to change how disasters are prepared for and responded to. Society is in danger.

The social and economic inequities that exist in natural disasters are immense. An article in the New York Times explained, “even when suffering the same amount of damage, counties

with minority residents often receive less money from FEMA than mostly white counties" (Flavelle, 2021, p. 1). The institutionalized racism in America is long existing and has greatly created inequitable systems. Low-income communities and communities that are largely people of color are already not receiving the support they need. These inequities are compounded as natural disasters occur more frequently and the resources remain unavailable to those who need them.

According to *Natural Disasters in a Global Environment*, many scientists are now focusing their research on climate change and how it correlates to the increase in natural disasters. The text explains that there is a connection between the increase in flooding and intense rainfall and the melting of glaciers (Penna, 2013, p. 27). There are dramatic connections between climate change and natural disasters. While more people seem to be concerned with a changing climate now than ever before, it is vital to continue this research to reduce the lives lost to natural disasters.

Innovative solutions are imperative to save lives that could be lost to future natural disasters. According to one article, living through a natural disaster can result in "emotional instability, stress reactions, anxiety, trauma and other psychological symptoms" (Makwana, 2014, p. 1). The impact on the individual is clear and can be even more devastating when it comes to full communities that are impacted. When thinking of solutions to natural disasters, it is important to consider the "dark sides" of social innovation. Referring to the *New Frontiers in Social Innovation Research (NFSIR)* text, it is interesting to think about whether an innovation qualifies as a social innovation or not if it has these unintended consequences, and one definition directly stated that the innovation had to be "successful." While some definitions of social innovation do not contain the word success, it is important to explore the unintended

consequences that could come from my research. The Foreword of *NFSIR* states, "History shows that most innovations create value for some people and destroy it for others" (Nicholls, 2015, p. XVI). This quote explains the inability to create societal change without negatively impacting some populations. Disaster response has room for innovation, but not space to encroach on vulnerable populations.

The "dark sides" of social innovation are important because of the vulnerable populations already at risk during natural disasters. As previously discussed, surviving disasters can have many serious short- and long-term impacts on individuals and that minorities are most at risk in general. Disaster survivors are currently experiencing an extremely difficult time in their lives or they have in the past. They may have lost loved ones, their home, or important memorabilia like photographs and family heirlooms. When working with survivors, it is important to proceed with caution and empathy. It can be hard for someone who just lost everything to then go through disaster research or innovations that they believe may bring further harm to them. Every stage of the innovation process must be mindful of the population that is being worked with. Minority communities will not be able to survive any potential "dark sides" that may occur during disaster relief innovation.

Natural disasters and the sectors

It can be challenging that so much of disaster relief efforts are taken on by nonprofit organizations. There are not many organizations that have the funds and resources that communities need when disasters happen. The three sectors of society (government, corporate, and nonprofit) are currently working together in different capacities to manage disasters one at a time. This research aims to create more options for how to best serve the public and survivors of disasters, rather than focusing on the implications to businesses and government bureaucracy.

After a natural disaster strikes, emergency medical teams (EMTs) are dispatched to assist rescue efforts. According to one article, “few comprehensive evaluations of the implementation of EMTs in natural disasters have been published to date. As a result, the evidence base to inform global guidelines and best practices is remarkably thin” (Hamilton, 2021, p. 1). This article will be invaluable to the research being done in the industry. Hamilton concludes that, “the effective functioning of EMTs is codependent on interactions between different actors, including national governments, international organizations, NGOs, local government agencies, community stakeholders and the private sector” (Hamilton, 2021, p. 1). More research is needed to examine the strengths and weaknesses between how the different sectors work together, especially during times of crisis.

Having EMTs on the ground is one growing strategy. Hamilton suggests that, “to optimize EMT efficiency, there needs to be increased recognition of the different actors involved [and] increased cooperation amongst EMTs under the coordination of international rosters” (Hamilton, 2021, p. 1). It is vital to relief efforts to have EMTs on site who are able to be recognized and communicate directly with other relief crews in order to rescue as many individuals as possible. While this research focuses primarily on EMTs, it is clear that there is room for improvement in disaster relief between sectors. Coordination between the sectors will ultimately help disaster response teams help those who need it most. Intentional coordination can open up available resources from outside of the disaster zone.

History of volunteer mobilization

Historically, when a disaster occurs, volunteer activity takes place all over the world in various scope and nature. The article “The Emergence of Volunteerism in a Post-disaster Context” states that, “as a global, dynamic phenomenon, volunteer behavior has assumed

numerous forms over time, and is constantly evolving and adapting" (Gurung, 2019, p. 58). With these changes, as well as the global scale, it can be difficult to capture a true definition of volunteerism. The authors suggest that although there are specialized organizations and businesses that are better equipped to handle emergency management, volunteers have always been in the lead when it comes to disaster response (Gurung, 2019, p. 58). In short, volunteers may come in all shapes and sizes, and serve many different roles when it comes to disaster response, but they always show up.

The research by Gurung concludes that all sectors of government, private sector, and civil society need to work together to combat disasters. Continuing, Gurung recognizes the value that volunteers could bring to the field when properly trained, explaining that many formal disaster response organizations "emphasize the need for the integration of volunteerism into formal emergency operations" (Gurung, 2019, p. 80). It is clear that volunteers play a vital role in disaster response and need to be properly accounted for and managed. Moving forward, this essay will look at best practices for volunteer mobilization and applying them to disaster relief.

Best practices for volunteer mobilization

After discussing the rise in natural disasters, how the sectors work together, and how volunteers can have an impact, it is imperative to consider how disaster relief organizations can best mobilize volunteers.

In the area of motivating people to participate in citizen science (research), one article suggests that volunteers should have a clear understanding of the project and the expectations of them. When a volunteer has an understanding of what they will be doing, they are more likely to have their expectations met and understand what they will be getting out of the experience. Similarly, volunteers should be recruited based on their individual motivations and needs. If a

volunteer experience is going to be a dirty job, consider the audience of who will be a best fit (Robinson, 2021, p. 2105). Volunteers will have the most impact when they are using their strengths to have a greater effect. Lastly, this article concludes that, "volunteers should be actively involved in all stages of the project and its products" (Robinson, 2021, p. 2105). Volunteers receive more from the experience when they understand the bigger picture by being involved. Many of these fundamentals can be applied to volunteer mobilization in disaster response. Disaster response volunteers will also benefit from understanding what is expected of them, what they are getting into, as well as being a part of each stage of the disaster cycle.

The article "Medical Volunteers during Pandemics, Disasters, and Other Emergencies: Management Best Practices" helps to create best practices for medical volunteers during times of crisis, similar to what could happen in a natural disaster setting. This article was helpful in defining what steps organizations can take to ensure the safety of their organization regarding legal matters and the safety of volunteers. When it comes to an organization backing volunteers, the article encourages the heavy use of training materials, prior to and during a disaster. The article mentions that some staff roles may be filled by volunteers but that does not equate the quality or importance of the position. Management and oversight is needed of volunteers (Winn, 2021, p. 295). While volunteers can serve staff roles, it is important to recognize the roles they are there to serve and the risks of volunteers serving the organization.

More specific to disasters, research shows that volunteers are more motivated by earning recognition or praise than to receive material rewards (Gurung, 2019, p. 64). In any studies of volunteering, the concept of altruism is discussed. One study concludes that "groups and individuals typically become more unified, cohesive and altruistic in the event of disasters and

feel a strong desire to help" (Gurung, 2019, p. 64). Volunteer behavior is how individuals show their values and create an agency that compels them to serve others in a time of crisis.

Summary

Natural disasters are increasing in frequency and cannot be ignored. This literature review examined why disasters are important to study by investigating the vulnerable populations that are impacted, reviewing volunteer best practices, and drawing conclusions about how disaster relief organizations can best mobilize volunteers. Disaster relief volunteers need to be kept safe while responding in a way that feels like they are doing the service for nothing in return. Most importantly, nonprofit organizations need to work closely with the government and private sectors to ensure a coherent response.

Having proper disaster preparedness and response plans are imperative to the population of community members that could be impacted. This is a matter of life and death.

Study design: This study will focus on qualitative research, focusing on narratives and content analysis. The research will draw new conclusions from existing literature. The study will take place as an interview with an individual from each organization who works in volunteer mobilization. Materials include Zoom and Microsoft Teams accounts, Google Docs and the recordings of the calls. There will be one participant from Team Rubicon and one from the American Red Cross.

Data collection methods: The interviews will take place virtually over Zoom or Microsoft teams. The names and titles of the participants will be collected and used in the final study. Survey questions were predetermined (See Appendix A) and sent to participants before the interview. An IRB Determination form found that this project does not need IRB approval or oversight (See Appendix B).

Introduction to American Red Cross

Research was done on two disaster relief organizations, the American Red Cross and Team Rubicon, to take a closer look at what their volunteer programs entail and how they mobilize their volunteers.

According to their website, "The American Red Cross (ARC) prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors" (*Mission & Values*, p. 1). They were founded in 1881 and have since grown to be part of the world's largest volunteer network—found in almost 200 countries. Their main services are listed as disaster relief, blood services, training and certification, international services, and military families.

Specific to disasters, ARC "responds to more than 60,000 disasters each year. At the heart of the ARC today are its 500,000 volunteers. Along with 35,000 paid staff members, the volunteers work through more than 600 local ARC chapters" (Murphy, 2021, p.1). While the ARC does pay some staff members, they are outnumbered by over ten times as many volunteers. In order for the ARC to properly function, it relies heavily on its volunteer workforce. Many social innovations have taken place in this organization and in others that have led to such a robust volunteer environment. The ARC website states that 95% of their disaster relief workers are volunteers (*Disaster Relief,* p. 1).

Their focus on disaster relief is broken down into homefire relief, hurricane relief, wildfire relief, flood relief, earthquake relief, winter storm relief and tornado relief. The vast majority of disasters they respond to are home fires. While their main disaster response seems to be immediate relief after a disaster, the website emphasizes that once the disaster is over, they pivot to helping people recover. The ARC works with community leaders and government and

relief agencies to address lingering community needs. They strive to organize and execute recovery strategies that include "providing emergency financial assistance in the immediate aftermath of a disaster; distributing financial assistance for households that need extra help in the long-term; and providing grants for community-based recovery services" (*Disaster Relief,* p. 1). Knowing that each disaster is unique, they focus on adapting their resources to the needs of the people in need.

ARC Interview

Abigail Wright-Geddes, Senior Volunteer Recruitment Specialist, was chosen to participate in this research on behalf of the American Red Cross. Abigail was chosen based on her title, length of time at the organization, and willingness to participate. The goal of this research was communicated to her, as well as that her name and title will be used in the final paper posted on Scholarworks. A recording of the meeting was captured for factual accuracy and will not be released or viewed by anyone other than the researcher. The meeting took place over Zoom, both participants had their cameras on and engaged in meaningful conversation. There was no apparent power dynamic between the researcher and the participant, leading answers to seem honest and genuine. When the questions were outside of Abigail's scope of practice or she did not feel comfortable answering, the researcher moved on to the next question.

The beginning of the interview focussed on learning how the organization utilizes volunteers in disaster relief and how they are organized. ARC is divided into five Chapters across the state. ARC's disaster volunteers are called the Disaster Action Team (DAT), which is their team of volunteers that are "boots on the ground" response. The DAT operates in counties that make up each of the Chapters. The ARC has a paid staff member for each chapter who is the Disaster Program Manager and oversees their volunteers.

There is a rigorous application process to become a DAT volunteer. First, there is an application on their online portal, a photo ID and background check, and motor vehicle records check. Vaccination is required for in-person events. After those checks are completed, a screening team calls and speaks to every person who applies and asks qualifying questions to guide into positions. After the screening team, an in-depth interview is conducted with the potential volunteer. From there, they are assigned a volunteer supervisor and required trainings to complete. All trainings are currently online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, though they may start bringing back in-person options. After the trainings, the volunteer will do a ride along with a current DAT volunteer. After the ride along and one response, the volunteer is now eligible to deploy regionally or nationally. The minimum requirement to stay an active DAT volunteer is one 12-hour "on call" shift a month. To be on call means that they are available to respond within two hours if a home fire happens in their county. It is worth noting that when there's a disaster in Michigan, they try to use local volunteers to respond.

There are many different specialty options available to DAT volunteers. The roles each individual serves in depends on how long they have been with the organization and what their skills are. There are specific trained media volunteers, government liaisons, shelter or feeding leads. Volunteers can hold nearly any position during a disaster, based on their individual experience and training noted in their internal training platform. Volunteers receive an ARC email address that is the primary means of communication for mobilization.

When it comes to ARC's biggest mobilization successes, Abigail said brand recognition is a large positive factor. "We're there. People know this is what we do. Our volunteers wear red vests that say Disaster Relief on the back," she said. People frequently call ARC when they want

to help. Abigail added that it helps to be a giant organization sometimes. Abigail mentioned that they receive about 300 applications a month to be an ARC volunteer, not just a DAT member.

After brand recognition, Abigail said that another one of their mobilization successes is the trust and respect that volunteers receive. “We give volunteers a lot of autonomy, a lot of leadership role opportunities,” Abigail said. “You and other volunteers are making the team and delivering the mission themselves.” The DAT volunteers know they have an important role to do. In relation to this, one of the things that Abigail seemed most passionate about, based on her excitement during discussion, was that volunteers and staff can each play various roles during a disaster. It is not uncommon for a staff member to report up to a volunteer, or vice versa. If a volunteer has more training and experience than a staff member, the volunteer is in charge.

When it comes to ARC’s biggest mobilization hurdles, Abigail was quick to mention that access to the internet is a large barrier in reaching some demographics of potential volunteers. Abigail says that her ARC Chapter is struggling with this barrier, but ARC National says that the only way to do volunteer applications is online. “That’s kicking out a lot of people who want to help but can’t,” Abigail said. Not only is the online application limiting people without access to the internet, but it is also limiting people who are not computer literate.

Next, Abigail said, “we don’t capitalize well when people want to help immediately.” Because of the applications, background checks, and required trainings, it is difficult for new volunteers who aren’t affiliated with them yet to get on the ground. As an example, Abigail mentioned that a tornado recently hit Gaylord, Michigan and they had to tell people they were not accepting volunteers because the shelter was fully staffed. Continuing with the hurdle of onboarding new volunteers, Abigail mentioned that it can be daunting for individuals to join such a big organization that is filled with acronyms. “They scare people off before they have the

chance to get involved," Abigail said. New volunteers can easily be overwhelmed. "We throw like 40 hours of training videos at new volunteers," Abigail said. "This is a huge hurdle. How do you get more people on board without losing the quality of volunteers made possible by those trainings?" Abigail questioned. Again, these required trainings are a national mandate.

When it comes to working with the different sectors, Abigail was able to describe how she works with other nonprofit organizations, the government sector, and corporate. The ARC works with other nonprofits to make connections in recruiting volunteers. Abigail said they feel value in collaborating on how they could share volunteers or other resources. She acknowledged that there is a challenge in the competition between organizations. The ARC has an interesting relationship with the government sector in that they work closely with the VA. Volunteers at the VA are the face of the Red Cross. They also work closely with local government Emergency Managers and FEMA. The paid ARC staff has a relationship with the government. The main relationship the ARC has with the private sector is through corporate volunteer programs.

With nearly 2,500 ARC volunteers in Michigan, it is clear that the ARC values its volunteers. The volunteers have a large impact on the communities they serve. The ARC takes a local focus in mobilizing their volunteers in a timely manner. While there are many benefits to being such a large organization, there are also hurdles that are associated with it.

Introduction to Team Rubicon

Team Rubicon (TR) was founded in 2010 by a man named Jake Wood. TR is a nonprofit organization, "that utilizes the skills and experiences of military veterans with first responders to rapidly deploy emergency response teams" (*About*, p. 1). TR has provided immediate relief across the United States and around the world to those impacted by disasters. When it comes to disasters, TR provides the following capabilities and services to affected communities: incident management, site surveys, disaster mapping and work order management, debris management, hazard mitigation, expedient home repaid, volunteer management, and emergency medicine. On international operations, they also offer primary care services (*Capabilities & Services,* p. 1*).*

TR works hard to help the most vulnerable in need when disasters strike. Because they believe that no two disasters are alike, TR sees that each requires a different approach and skillset. According to their website, "effective disaster response comes from effective training and preparedness. TR offers training to equip members with valuable skills (*Relief*, p. 1). TR seeks to make the largest impact possible by focusing on underserved or economically-challenged communities. "Disasters represent a massive financial cost, and by providing immediate relief work, free of cost, TR aims to help communities begin recovery sooner" (*Relief*, p. 1).

TR is mainly run by volunteers. With over 65,000 members, a dedicated group of 500+ volunteer leaders make the organization function highly on a national level and a local level. Over the past 10 years, TR has had 785 field operations, totaling 1,212,383 hours deployed in response to disasters (*Relief*, p. 1).

TR Interview

Ember Munoz, Mobilization North Branch Associate was chosen to participate in this research on behalf of Team Rubicon. Ember was chosen based on her title, length of time at the organization, and willingness to participate. The goal of this research was communicated to her, as well as that her name and title will be used in the final paper posted on Scholarworks. A recording of the meeting was captured for factual accuracy and will not be released or viewed by anyone other than the researcher. The meeting took place over Microsoft Teams, both participants had their cameras on and engaged in healthy discussion. Answers seemed to be answered honestly and to the best of her ability. When the questions were outside of Ember's scope of practice or she did not feel comfortable answering, she was transparent as to what she could speak to instead.

At the start of the interview, Ember explained that TR functions in geographical branches. The North Branch, where she is located, has 26 states and territories. Ember is responsible for notifying, mobilizing, and providing permission for volunteers to respond to operations. She has a team of volunteer mobilization leaders that work together to vet, dispatch, and maintain records for volunteers who respond to disasters. Ember and the North Branch volunteer mobilization leaders also manage when and how volunteers return home. From collecting data from deployment (who went, what days working, what days traveling) and ensuring they are marked Home Safe in their internal management software.

When someone is interested in volunteering with TR, they must first start with signing up online. To become deployment eligible, they must pass a background check and an online training called TR 101. Occasionally, people may deploy for a day if a background check is in progress, however, they do listen to the criteria of the other organizations they are working with. For example, if a local church says volunteers can't come without a background check, then

that's the requirement TR will use as well. Vaccination confirmation is now also a requirement for in-person operations.

Each operation is assigned a mobilization radius, meaning that volunteers can respond if they are within a certain distance from the operation. These geo-areas vary by magnitude of the disaster and scale of the response. Ember explained that mobilization works with communications and marketing within their internal portal. She differentiated between transaction or commercial communication. Mobilization uses transaction in that a volunteer agrees to accept the communication about something. Commercial is letting everyone know about something with no direct call to action. Mobilization uses transactional communication when sending out an email or a text message as a call to action. These messages are sent based on the defined radius and contain a link to sign up. Once operations are approved and calls to action for volunteers go out, a volunteer communications leader will then post on their local volunteer social media pages and send out the opportunities in the newsletter.

As someone with years of experience specifically in mobilization, Ember had a lot of responses to what she thinks are some of TR's mobilization successes. "I think we do a great job of using and adapting EMS to meet the needs of the organization," Ember said. EMS is their volunteer management portal. "It's as accurate as the volunteer has the ability to make it. It's as on-time as we can get." Because this technology is up to date and adapted to their uses, TR can streamline and move quickly to mobilize volunteers when disasters strike. Ember mentioned that the mobilization process used to take about 48 hours, but now it can often be down to four or five hours.

Another success, according to Ember, is the development and function of mobilization as a whole. TR's recent change in geographic areas has allowed mobilization to be better utilized.

Each branch now has a mobilization associate, which creates better access for volunteers to reach full-time TR mobilization employees. Ember emphasized that accessibility is incredibly important. She builds her team of volunteer mobilization leaders to be self-sufficient, but it is incredibly important for them to have access to her in a timely manner.

While technology can be a helpful response, Ember has found that the same technology can also be a mobilization hurdle for TR. The volunteer management portal allows TR to communicate and coordinate 156,000 people quickly, but some people struggle with the technology. Ember said, “there’s a lot of issues that can happen with a computer and then people think something is wrong with mobilization.” She explained that it might not be a bad mobilization process, but instead, it might be poor internet connection, website not updating, or full cookies or cache. She spends a substantial amount of time helping people change settings and clear browser settings.

A second barrier is the balance between catering to a volunteer's needs and encouraging them to be independent. Ember receives messages from individuals who want to be mobilized, but who did not go through the portal. She sees this as part of the technology barrier. While the online system can streamline mobilization, many volunteers would rather bypass the system and get sent to disasters as soon as possible. “They just want to go out there and do work, they don’t want to do all of the necessary steps first,” Ember said. Not following the proper mobilization process creates risks for the individual and the organization. Of the roughly 213 operations nationally, she said this probably happens every operation.

What is most important about this broken process is that the mobilization leader's role is all about safety, accountability, efficiency, recognizing who you’re sending out the door and who comes back. “You can be a part of TR and never go to an operation, meaning never be

mobilized. We have about 30,000 active deployers," Ember said. "Everyone that wants to respond to a disaster, they have to be mobilized. They all have to go through mobilization. Every single active grayshirt has to go through us." Mobilization leaders are key to knowing who is sent where and when. They ensure everyone has the proper trainings, background checks, and are in the distance required. Ember and her team have incredibly important roles when it comes to these mobilization successes and barriers.

TR works with other nonprofit organizations when disasters strike. TR has an external volunteer portal that they share with other organizations that have a strong training and application process so they can share volunteers. They also use a software called Crisis Cleanup that allows all disaster response organizations in a community to claim work areas, to improve how the organizations can respond. For government relations, TR works closely with local Emergency Managers. They also rely heavily on their network of veterans and work with them as closely as they can. TR receives an immense amount of funding from corporate partnerships. They are cognizant of creating partnerships that align with their mission and vision, rather than accepting funds from anywhere.

TR is a growing organization that knows it needs to evolve as disasters do. Their successes with technology have saved the organization time and money, all while allowing their volunteers to best serve their communities. The barriers in mobilization seem to be important areas for improvement to ensure the safety of all stakeholders.

Findings comparison

As international disaster response organizations, the ARC and TR have a lot of similar ideologies and mobilization strategies. Both organizations have a "no two disasters are alike" mentality. Because of this, they both focus on being flexible and adaptable. These attributes can lead to constant innovation, which is much needed in disaster response. Next, both organizations focus on a location-based mobilization strategy. Having local volunteers increases the response time and rate of responding volunteers.

The two organizations focus heavily on training. The amount of training volunteers receive may be why volunteers enjoy being involved in leadership. Having volunteer leaders allows for the location-based models to thrive. Further research should be done on the quality and content of trainings to help keep training a motivator, rather than a hibiter. It was clear that TR requires fewer trainings before a volunteer is deployable, yet both organizations find that training and experience of their volunteers is what make them so successful.

The previous literature review concluded that volunteers have the best experience when they are involved at every level of a project. Both organizations having volunteers being involved at every leadership level may be demonstrating exactly what the literature suggested. Leadership opportunities allow volunteers to feel like they are serving in an altruistic way, while actually receiving valuable experience.

Both organizations have dynamic and sometimes complex relationships with the three sectors: nonprofit, government, and private. There is competition among nonprofits for volunteers and funding. Despite the competition for volunteers, both organizations have found ways to communicate with other groups to best help their communities in times of need. Their shared emphasis on local responsiveness has allowed them both to have relationships with their

local emergency management organizations. It is clear that private corporations contribute most to the disaster industry through the donation of their dollars.

These two organizations struggle with the necessity of volunteers needing to have access to the internet. This mandate leaves out valuable populations that would otherwise be able and potentially willing to volunteer. Not only is access to the internet a barrier, but computer literacy is a whole separate issue. Both organizations seem to struggle with maximizing their technology while keeping it to a point where volunteers can utilize these features. More research should be done to best determine which technologies should be used and how these barriers can be overcome.

TR's focus on vulnerable populations is admirable, and something that must be done when serving disaster survivors. The literature review gave details on how and why victims of natural disasters are often populations that are considered at-risk.

Conclusions

This small study and literature review has revealed ways that disaster relief organizations can better organize themselves to respond to the increased need. It has been clear throughout this essay that natural disasters are complex and are impacting vulnerable populations. The need for organizations to be able to best mobilize is immense.

There were a couple potential limitations to this research. The researcher has previously had a working relationship with Ember which could have impacted the results. To best understand the nuances between the organizations, additional interviews could have been done with different representatives from the organizations. Further, these two organizations are not direct comparisons. They have different funding models, and varying member sizes and offered services.

The work that the ARC and TR are doing is incredibly important. There is more research that can be done, but it is clear that these organizations are leading through innovation. The biggest conclusion drawn from this research is that technology can be both a strength and a weakness for disaster response organizations. The required access to the internet is limiting the potential to mobilize many volunteers. Based on the literature review, the two organizations are doing many mobilization practices correctly. They are getting volunteers involved at every level, creating meaningful work for them to do, and providing proper training before deployment. The literature review focuses on the best disaster response operations having a balance between the stakeholders in all sectors. Based on the responses received in the interviews about their relationships with the sectors, it would be highly beneficial for both organizations to expand and explore these partnerships with the different sectors. Overall, this research made it clear that natural disasters need organized responses because vulnerable populations are in danger.

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Appendix A:

Survey Questions:

- Please confirm your full name and title.
- Tell me about your role.
- How long have you worked at ARC/TR?
- How does your organization work with other nonprofit organizations?
- How does your organization work with the government sector/programs?
- How does your organization work with the private sector?
- How many volunteers does your organization have?
    - What are your volunteer demographics?
    - How are they organized?
    - In what roles do they serve on disasters?
- How does your organization distribute information to volunteers?
- What is the mobilization process like for volunteers?
- What trainings do you have in place for volunteers PRIOR to deploying?
- What trainings do you have in place for volunteers DURING deployment?
- What is the organization's biggest success to mobilizing volunteers?
- What is the organization’s biggest hurdle in mobilizing volunteers?

Appendix B:

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
www.gvsu.edu

DATE: March 17, 2022

TO: Coeli Fitzpatrick, Ph.D.
FROM: Office of Research Compliance & Integrity
PROJECT TITLE: How Disaster Relief Organizations Mobilize Volunteers
REFERENCE #: 22-258-H
SUBMISSION TYPE: IRB Research Determination Submission

ACTION: Not Research
EFFECTIVE DATE: March 17, 2022
REVIEW TYPE: Administrative Review

Thank you for your submission of materials for your planned scholarly activity. It has been determined that this project does not meet the definition of research* according to current federal regulations. The project, therefore, does not require further review and approval by the IRB. Scholarly activities that are not covered under the Code of Federal Regulations should not be described or referred to as "*research*" in materials to participants, sponsors or in dissemination of findings. While performing this project, you are expected to adhere to the institution's code of conduct and any discipline-specific code of ethics.

A summary of the reviewed project and determination is as follows:

The purpose of this project is to learn about what disaster relief organizations are doing to mobilize volunteers for international response. Because this project is not designed to create new generalizable knowledge, it does not meet the federal definition of research. IRB oversight is not needed.

This determination letter is limited to IRB review. It is your responsibility to ensure all necessary institutional permissions are obtained prior to beginning this project. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring all contracts have been executed, any necessary Data Sharing Agreements and Material Transfer Agreements have been signed, and any other outstanding items are completed.

An archived record of this determination form can be found in IRBManager from the Dashboard by clicking the "_ xForms" link under the "My Documents & Forms" menu.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity at (616) 331-3197 or rci@gvsu.edu. Please include your study title and study number in all correspondence with our office.

*Research is a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (45 CFR 46.102 (d)).

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