

# Focus Group Protocol – Community-based Human Services Providers

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

Tailor the following interview guide by: (1) skipping sections or questions not relevant for the respondents; or (2) asking appropriate follow-up questions or probe into participant responses as needed to obtain additional information or clarification. If time is limited, the facilitator will prioritize the most important questions.

Before beginning the focus group session, the facilitator will read the introduction to describe the purpose to respondents, answer any questions they have about the session, and ask for their consent to record the focus group.

### Purpose

The purpose of this focus group is to collect insights on issues and challenges that community-based human services providers experience in preparing for and responding to disasters. Engaging these human services providers who have disaster experience will enrich ACF's understanding of their needs, contribute to more informed decision-making, and help ACF ensure it keeps the well-being of those it serves at the center of ACF's work.

This learning will be used to inform the development of OHSEPR's Disaster Human Services Capabilities Framework, a key document in guiding the nation's human services in disasters.

### Desired Outcome

This activity will improve future human services disaster preparedness and response by establishing a common standard for disaster human services planning and provision by state, tribal, local, and territorial partners, and community-based service providers.

### Method

The facilitator will conduct two 90-minute focus group sessions, each with approximately 10 community-based providers who have assisted in delivering or coordinating human services during or following a disaster. These sessions will be held using an online platform (e.g., Zoom or MS Teams). In addition to group discussion, participants will engage in the session through polling questions and chat function. Facilitators will follow the facilitation discussions below, and adapt the questions based on the participants and direction of the focus group as advised in the *Instructions for Facilitators* section above.

Participation is voluntary. Responses will not be attributable to a specific individual. Categorical responses (e.g., polling questions) will be aggregated. The input received through this session will be combined with other data sources to inform the Disaster Human Services Capabilities Framework. If quotes are used in the framework, they will be anonymized to protect the individual contributor.

# Focus Group Discussion

## Introduction [10 minutes]

### Contractor Intro

My name is [co-facilitator's name], and this is [co-facilitator's name], and we are contractors for the Administration for Children and Families, specifically with the Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response also called OHSEPR. We will be facilitating this discussion session today. We would like to thank you for joining us and sharing your perspective and experiences.

For background, OHSEPR is an office within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. OHSEPR's mission is to lead, strengthen, and synchronize human services to prepare, respond, and recover from emergencies and crises.

Human services are economic and social programs that support Americans with shelter, food, water, clothing, case management, family reunification, childcare, early childhood development, cash assistance, refugee support, home energy assistance, and transportation. Human services may also include support related to domestic violence, human trafficking, child welfare, child custody, and runaway and homeless youth. Disaster human services, specifically refers to the provision of human services to individuals in need before, during, and after a disaster such as a hurricane, flooding, or even a public health emergency like COVID-19. This work aims to create a capabilities framework that informs STLT human services programs about the essential components for providing successful disaster human services.

For the purpose of this discussion, OHSEPR seeks to learn from community-based providers of disaster human services who prepare for and respond to emergencies. We would like to understand essential activities and practices of local human service providers in disaster preparedness and response as well as the primary facilitators for and impediments to successful disaster response. The purpose of this effort is to develop a capabilities framework to help STLT human services programs plan, prioritize, and act, in future emergency responses.

We will focus on the following areas:

- Planning and Preparedness;
- Resource Management;
- Training;
- Incident Management and Service Delivery; and
- Our initial Capabilities Framework Outline.

Your participation is essential to supporting this work. We are relying on your insight and feedback to shape the Disaster Human Services Capabilities Framework into a guiding resource for STLT human services entities to better provide services. There may be sensitive information discussed here today. Nothing shared today will be attributed to an individual and all answers will be kept private. We will combine your input with others to improve human services for communities experiencing disasters.

We would like to record this conversation to assist in documenting this discussion. The recording will only be viewed and heard by our immediate team. The files will be deleted once all notes have been taken. Do we have your consent for the session to be recorded?

Do you have any questions for our team before we begin?

## PRA Statement

“OHSEPR is collecting this information to identify areas of improvement and support for disaster human services preparedness and response efforts. This discussion will last approximately 90 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. All information will be kept private. A Federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and no individual or entity is required to respond to, nor shall an individual or entity be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB Control Number. The OMB # is 0970-0630 and the expiration date is 3/31/2027.

## Roles and Experience [5 minutes]

*We'll begin by listing the names and titles and organization of participants. If we don't call your name, please provide your name and contact information in the chat.*

| Attendees |      |              |       |
|-----------|------|--------------|-------|
| Name      | Role | Organization | Email |
|           |      |              |       |
|           |      |              |       |
|           |      |              |       |
|           |      |              |       |

1. What services do you provide daily?
  - a. Who/what organization do you serve and where? What are your routine services?
  - b. Do you work in a federal or state organized/funded program?
2. How do your routine services differ during a disaster?

## Planning and Preparedness [15 minutes]

*We would like to hear about your experience with issues, challenges, and gaps in human services planning and preparedness. Preparedness efforts occur before the disaster and may include emergency planning or coordination with emergency management officials.*

1. Have you done any planning or preparedness activities with your work before a disaster? If so, what were these activities?
2. What are your biggest challenges in planning and preparing for a disaster?
3. What has worked well in planning and preparing for a disaster?

4. Does your organization participate in preparedness and response planning in your area (e.g., local or state) that includes other sectors such as health, emergency management, etc.? If so, please describe.
  - a. What are some of the challenges of coordinating planning and preparedness efforts with these other sectors?
  - b. Do you coordinate with other human services non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on preparedness and response planning for human services delivery?
5. Many government agencies, associations, and organizations develop guidelines to strengthen emergency preparedness and response. Do you use standard guidance or technical documents to help you plan and deliver human services during and following disasters?
6. Is equity a consideration in your planning for disaster human services delivery? If so, how? We define equity as the provision of community-specific services and resources for disaster survivors that are accessible and culturally and linguistically tailored to mitigate disparities in health and well-being and support resilience.
  - a. Does your organization work with vulnerable populations (e.g., populations with a history of access challenges, risks related to social determinants, non-English speakers)?
  - b. Do you identify and quantify specific populations that your program serves?

OPTIONAL QUESTION for poll/chat:

What type of disaster preparedness exists within your organization to support you and other direct providers in your preparedness?

- a. Plan development and review
- b. Exercises
- c. Trainings
- d. Q&A sessions
- e. Documents or written guidance
- f. Other (write in)

1. Are they beneficial to your program's disaster readiness?

## Resource Management [15 minutes]

*Now we'll spend some time discussing resource management, particularly how your programs access funding and your experiences scaling human services efforts in a disaster.*

1. Do you receive routine human services funding from federal, state or county government sources? In a disaster, have they given you permission to deliver your services differently or do you have other flexibility in your delivery?
2. Could you describe how you have used and scaled routine human services programs (e.g., SNAP, TANF, state human service programs, Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) or Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)) to meet increased needs for your services during disasters?
  - a. How is using these programs during a disaster different from routine human services?
  - b. Do the requirements (e.g., eligibility) of these programs change during a disaster when there is an increase in need? If so, how?

3. How do you receive guidance updates about waivers, supplemental funding to existing human services funding, or new funding sources for disaster human services?
  - a. Who do you get this information from?
  - b. What would be the best or your preferred channels and communication methods to access or receive this information?
  - c. If you receive federal funding, have you ever requested a waiver or implemented flexibilities to continue providing human services for your community?
4. How do you fund emergency preparedness activities such as planning, disaster exercises, etc.?

## Training [10 minutes]

*Next, we'll discuss training.*

1. Does your organization receive training or other organizational development support from local government (e.g., human services, emergency management, or others)?
2. Have you or your staff been trained in standard incident management approaches such as those published through FEMA's National Incident Management System? Others?
3. What type of training or other organizational support would you like to receive (besides funding)?

## Incident Management and Service Delivery [15 minutes]

*Next, we would like to hear more about your organization's operations in disaster response. Response refers to providing services during or after the disaster, including in a prolonged disaster. Our objective with these questions is to determine how services are delivered and how you coordinate with other providers.*

1. What issues or challenges has your organization experienced while providing services during or after a disaster?
  - a. What worked well for your organization during or after a disaster?
2. During an emergency response, how do you communicate with your clients and the public about the availability and provision of human services?
3. How do you coordinate response services with other partners in your area?
  - a. Do you coordinate with emergency management teams in your area?
4. Who do you call during a disaster response if you need to escalate urgent assistance requests?
5. During an emergency response, how do you send and receive communications within the human services provider community?
6. Has your organization supported a disaster where your area's emergency response plan was formally activated and disaster human services were provided? If so, were you notified and included in incident management team structures during the response? Please describe.
7. How does your organization ensure that the delivery of disaster human services meets the specific and individual needs of recipients? How does your organization ensure equity?

## Draft Capabilities [15 minutes]

OHSEPR has developed draft capabilities for STLT human services programs. A capability is a specific focus area where a combination of resources, skills, and processes come together to enable effective delivery of services with regards to that focus area. We would like your feedback on the capabilities we have outlined for successful provision of disaster human services.

*[share screen with capabilities outline]*

1. Which capabilities are most important for disaster preparedness and response? Why?
2. Is there anything critical to your work in disaster response that's missing here?
3. Is there anything in this framework you would say is a low priority for STLT human service organizations?
4. What other disaster human service capability/ies would you like for the human services programs in your jurisdiction to have?

## Wrap Up [5 minutes]

*Before we wrap up, the team would like to give you the opportunity to say any final thoughts.*

- Is there anything else you'd like to share with us today regarding disaster human services?

*Thank you for your time and input! Our team really appreciates the feedback you have shared with us today and your part in shaping this impactful work.*

*After this call, you will receive an email from us with our contact information. Feel free to contact us if you think of anything else.*

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT OF 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BURDEN: The purpose of this information collection is to identify areas of improvement and support for disaster human services preparedness and response efforts. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 90 minutes per respondent, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. This is a voluntary collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is 0970-0630 and the expiration date is 3/31/2027. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact Bridget Miller at [Bridget.Miller@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:Bridget.Miller@acf.hhs.gov).