

Coordination of Donated Goods & Services

1995 NVOAD State Leadership Conference - Tempe, Arizona

I first volunteered for the American Red Cross in 1982. Alviso, a small, low income, predominantly Hispanic community had flooded the night before displacing over 1000 people. On the first morning I was put on "Communications" answering 4 phones with only a pad and a pencil (and no information). I learned about many aspects of disaster assistance on the job while fielding calls of every imaginable type. It impressed me how the ARC mobilized and began operating in a fairly efficient manner within a just couple of days.

But for 3 weeks I was shocked at the continuing chaos brought on by the lack of coordination between agencies. This was particularly obvious in the area of In Kind Donations and distribution. Because there was no VOAD, there was no recognized vehicle to call a meeting or discuss needs or activities. There was a reluctance or inability to share information and client referrals. The public received no direction, and the area was soon flooded a second time - with goods instead of water! Duplication of services was rampant which led to extremely unequal services to victims (depending on their luck or sophistication). Some people received two or three new refrigerators while others couldn't get an ice cube. Each agency seemed to feel they were doing their best and that this was somehow the fault of the others. It would have appeared almost arrogant for any agency to call a meeting of agencies to discuss coordination problems.

I left this disaster believing the situation could be improved, and set about creating a VOAD in the area with the help of another ARC volunteer. Several agencies eventually agreed to meet, and found that they had virtually the same experiences as each other. They realized it was to everyone's benefit to coordinate disaster relief efforts. Now it is impossible to imagine that a relief operation could be attempted without our mutual support and knowledge.

The work done by Northern California VOAD agencies during the past 12 years has been impressive. Nonetheless, In Kind continues to create challenges, and the need for relief agencies to work even more closely together in the future.

In recent years, Coordination of Donated Goods and Services has emerged as a topic of increasing interest in government and Non Profit disaster planning. For the purpose of this session, I will describe to the best of my understanding, the plans of some of the major players in this area, how they fit together and how they don't. I will try to identify some of the obstacles that hinder better coordination, and list that factors that would be necessary to make major improvements. The main focus will be on In Kind Donations.

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Current Plans / Policies

California VOAD's

California is the only state with 2 VOADs, serving the large population centers in Northern and Southern California. While the types of disasters at the two ends of the state are basically the same, the 2 California VOADs operate completely independently and their structures are very different.

As with every organization that consists of volunteers, VOAD's direction and capabilities in any area is dependent on the vision, needs, and resources of the participants. The Executive Committee of NorCal VOAD recently discussed the need for better understanding of the real timing and criteria of government relief programs, and the possibility of using our energy as a group to see if we could help speed up the process. At the same time, Southern California VOAD (SCVOAD) was voting to take a step back from operational functioning at its level. Southern California was divided into 5 districts or clusters of counties and each will form its own active VOAD. The SCVOAD structure will consist of only one representative from each cluster.

But whatever the format, no one is at a VOAD meeting who is not representing some other organization. NVOAD was originated and structured to be a *non-operational* vehicle for organizations to meet, share information, and coordinate their efforts. There are no "VOAD Volunteers" and no "VOAD resources". Most VOAD representatives know a lot about the activities of their own organization and something about VOAD, but have minimal knowledge about the policies, procedures & potential of the other members, outside the areas that interact with their own activities.

The American Red Cross (ARC) routinely provides a *Liaison for Voluntary Agencies* at each disaster to assure a point of contact for local and out of town organizations participating in the relief effort. Even if the area had a previously established VOAD, members will likely be busy with their own agencies' activities and would use VOAD for information sharing. It is the main function of the Liaison to assure that facilities are provided, notices are sent, outreach is done, and information gathered from all sectors is shared with interested agencies.

Within this current framework, it is difficult to imagine a "VOAD Hotline" to manage In Kind offers. Even with donated facilities and phones, few, if any VOAD agencies could spare a cross trained volunteer who could effectively direct calls and answer questions about the activities of the various agencies. When we have a VOAD table in the Service Center or DAC, every agency can't send a volunteer to sit there all the time, and at best we take shifts. There will be literature from many organizations and a person at the table who is really only familiar with one of them. It has always

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been very important to VOAD members to maintain their individual identification and agency affiliation. The potential for increased knowledge of resources, needs and activities of other organizations, and the ability to better direct inquiries and make referrals is not fully realized.

Likewise with a warehouse, or storage facility. Even though NVOAD is now a 501(c)3 organization, and could presumably enter into a lease agreement, it would require an unprecedented amount of negotiation and cooperation. Most likely, one member organization (with assets, credit history, and a local authorized signature) would have to be ultimately legally responsible. That organization would naturally run the warehouse, and allow other member organizations to rent or use space. They would also receive the utility bills, put the facility on their insurance, manage the inventory and clean up the mess at the end. While VOAD members have successfully shared facilities during disaster and benefited greatly from the proximity and communications of the symbiotic relationship, each organization was still “doing its thing” in its allotted space.

Through VOAD plans have been refined, channels of communication improved and training increased. But there is a difference between having a plan and having a comprehensive strategy.

FEMA NDIS (National Disaster Information System)

A national 800 number, the data base, and the services of VITA (Volunteers in Technical Assistance) are almost immediately available after a Federally declared disaster. Like all federal resources, the FEMA 800# can only be activated on request of State. FEMA's Donations Policy Memorandum dated July 26, 1994 states:

“The State and local government, in coordination with VOAD are ultimately in charge of the donations management system. The Federal government, international involvement, and NVOAD roles are always in support to the State and local governments”.

Technically, the State should implement its own In Kind Donations Management Plan and request assistance on the basis that their management resources are inadequate for the scope of the disaster. In Kind is not a top priority in the California State Disaster Plan and while there is a 2 page policy memo, there really is no management plan.

In the “bottoms up” design, resources are not offered from higher levels unless they are requested. Unless they are a “frequent flooder” or have had previous federally declared disasters, many local governments wouldn't know about the availability of the FEMA 800 number or In Kind printout unless they were informed by the State OES, or it was automatically distributed to them. If local government requests it their chances

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improve. Because of our NVOAD connections with FEMA, voluntary agencies are more likely to get access to the daily printout and share the information with each other.

The drawbacks of the printout become more obvious as the time passes and the list grows. Because we have not established special sorts of the offers with FEMA, they are printed out in chronological order of the time the offer was made. The information is not updated when offers have either expired or been utilized, which is a little hard on both the donors and the agencies. Donors continue to get calls long after they are done with the transaction, and agencies spend a lot of time calling to find out that someone else has already claimed the offer. Each agency has to clean their own list and there is no provision for sharing this information. Also, as demand grows distribution becomes increasingly difficult.

But when viewed as a short term support service to capture the offers and take some of the pressure off of those involved with more immediate needs, the benefits are clear. The FEMA 800 number can provide a consistent, standardized response to offers and a centralized number that the public talk to. But as with every system that is set up in response to an emergency, our training is to begin planning to dismantle it as soon as it is functioning. The FEMA 800 number is meant only to fill a gap and then roll into some other program. So there may be no real closure. No one is ultimately responsible to acknowledge the offers or follow up on requests. Like everything else in disaster, one day it is there and the next day it is not.

NOTE: Details of the NDIS are outlined in a 1993 Report to the NVOAD Executive Committee on the FEMA Donations Steering Committee, by Monte Sahlin.

California State

It is the responsibility of government to maintain order, prevent further destruction or injuries, and restore the infrastructure of the area as quickly as possible. In the disaster response plan, the State of California does not intend to solicit or utilize In Kind Donations, unless a local government makes a specific request. The California State Policy regarding Donated Goods and Services was outlined in a memo written by John Pasarello on August 3rd, 1995, at the request of Dave Vargo. The State SOP can be summarized as follows:

- 1.** When possible, local needs should be met at the county level. Requests for needed items or services should be made to the County EOC and filled from within the operational area.

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2. If requests cannot be filled locally, the Operations Area should forward them to the Logistics Section of the State OES Regional Emergency Operations Center (REOC).

3. The REOC will ask the Information & Public Affairs Section (IPA) to broadcast the needs to the general public, private businesses, and governmental agencies, through the system they have established for this purpose.

4. When donated goods and services are offered, the phone calls are routed to the Logistics Section of the REOC, which will in turn tell callers to telephone the FEMA 800# to document these offers. If this is not available, and it is determined that there is a need, the REOC will open an 800# and staff it.

5. Logistics would work with the Care and Shelter Branch within the Operations Section on need and distribution mechanisms. The Care & Shelter Branch consists of the State DSS, the ARC and the SA. The ARC and SA have receiving, distribution and deployment systems for shelters and neighborhood destinations.

6. After the REOC closes, if there is still a need to coordinate offers and requests, John Passerello will take over for the State responsibilities and facilitate logistics on the receiving end.

Presumably, if a very useful, very easy to utilize offer is made to the State, it will be accepted. However, the general philosophy is that the State has mandated responsibilities to fulfill, and this is not one of them. Agreements are in place with vendors and it is easier, faster, and more reliable to purchase materials that are needed. If local government makes a request during the Emergency Response Phase, the State will supply it from the closest, fastest source that can be identified - whether it is free or not. Only if the required resource was unavailable through normal channels would the State consider soliciting the public with an In Kind request.

The FEMA 800 number was never activated after the 1995 January and March Floods in Northern California. After the Northridge earthquake, FEMA asked the State if the 800 number should be activated and finally it was "requested", but the State never really utilized the printout. It is not that John Passarelo, the Regional Administrator for Central Valley, is anti-In Kind or even unfamiliar with the potential value of these donations. John has been a Salvation Army Board Member in the Sacramento Area for years. The issue is more one of time and priorities. John is also in charge statewide of donations, disaster budgeting, supervising the State EOC, and acting as the State VOLAG Representative. Things can get out of control very quickly

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and any entity venturing into the In Kind world must devote constant attention into keeping order. The State does not want to divert energy to this.

But even if the state of California does not intend to solicit or utilize In Kind donations, the quality of In Kind coordination and management will impact the State's ability to perform its functions. Excess traffic, clogged staging areas, goods dumped at random, additional debris in the landfill, are everybody's problems. John Pasarello is aware of this and is open to working to facilitate VOAD's access to federal coordinating in the area of In Kind.

American Red Cross (ARC)

In past years, the ARC volunteers were instructed that the ARC did not accept In Kind donations - only cash. This was stressed so frequently that there was sometimes no differentiation between the offer of a box of used clothing and a semi truck full of fruit juice. The general understanding of the policy was "Just say no". This not only led to the loss of some valuable donations, but also alienated some large corporations, whose In Kind Donations would far exceed the cash they could donate (and whose products the ARC sometimes had to purchase later). It also gave some people the impression that the ARC was just greedy and did not appreciate the offerings of the populace to help the disaster victims. This image most probably translated into additional reduction of cash donations. The rationale behind this strict policy was partially that of the state - the ARC is mandated to do certain things and this is not one of them. There were plenty of other agencies to handle "In Kind" and they were welcome to it.

But there is more to the In Kind picture. In one of my first ARC disaster classes (Emergency Service to Families), I asked why we gave each person a voucher to purchase a refrigerator individually when we could do a bulk purchase, bring in a truckload of better quality refrigerators and deliver them to everyone's house for less money. Fortunately, I did not have an Instructor who just said "Because that's how we do it." She explained to the class that if we did that, we would hinder the economic recovery of the area. Just as the victims had lost their homes and often their jobs, local merchants could lose their livelihood in a "secondary disaster" if we brought in free goods from outside when they were available locally. Durable goods and appliances last for years and normally people in an area would replace them at staggered times. But when they are all destroyed and replaced simultaneously, there will not be much business again for a long time. Voluntary agencies have to take care not to inadvertently further disrupt an already shattered economy.

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In recent years, the ARC has changed its policy on In Kind and now has even created a separate department to deal with this function. Like the FEMA 800 number, this function is not automatically activated. But increasingly, ARC workers are seeing that In Kind, properly managed can greatly enhance the relief effort.

The ARC In Kind Function solicits specific resources, as requested by the other functions, and screens offers for routinely needed items. If items are offered that are not required by the ARC, donors are given the phone numbers of other agencies working in the relief effort that have expressed a desire to receive that type of offer.

In the confusion of disaster, the response to a question or an offer is often dependent on who picks up the phone (how much they know, what their instructions are, and their level of discrimination). One of the greatest values of VOAD is knowing that you are communicating with a reliable contact. As a Liaison to Voluntary Agencies, I would prefer that the more attractive offers are listed and "brokered" so there is a better chance of the information reaching the appropriate person in another agency.

The ARC policies on In Kind are best summarized in the publication "*Get the Picture? - A Quick Response Guide for Handling Gifts of Goods and Services During Disasters*". The In Kind Function has also created some wonderful materials that are available to any agency to enhance their procedures. The *In Kind Donations Information Packet* includes: Check lists, Donations Needs Lists, guidelines on In Kind criteria for all donations, training materials, tracking and reporting forms, and information on tax regulations and requirements. I have brought samples of these that will be available after the presentation. The more VOAD organizations share the tools we create, the more we can benefit from our collective experiences and perceptions.

Northern California Disaster Preparedness Network

When the American Red Cross received excess donations after the Loma Prieta Earthquake, the funds were placed in an escrow fund and the proceeds are used each year to fund Disaster Preparedness projects in the counties that were declared in the 1989 event.

These funds supported a project that was able to build a community network that solidified with the Oakland Hills Fire Response in 1991. Thirty Bay Area Agencies worked together to produce the "*Bay Area In Kind Donation Disaster Management System - A Concept of Coordinated Community Operations*". This is a wonderful tool that was put together through the combined experience of many different types of agencies, serving diverse populations, in several different types of disaster. It is a model for a collaborative effort in a large urban area.

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The Network oversight committee is promoting a comprehensive Plan to form 9 Regional vehicles for disaster preparation and response coordination in the Bay Area. Funding provides for a staffing and administration to implement a standardized program involving various service delivery organizations in each area: Contra Costa County, San Mateo County, Marin County, San Francisco Inter Agency Preparedness Network, Tri County (Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito Counties), CARD (Alameda County), and CADRE (Santa Clara County). Monthly meetings for Regional Project Managers will create a mutual aid plan between regions. One planning assumption is that there will be adequate funding for continued training and materials that are necessary to maintain any system that is created.

Many of the organizations recruited for these programs are also members of VOAD, and one of the first questions is whether there is a redundancy to have a VOAD and these associations in the same area. There are several conceptual differences and I feel, advantages to the presence of both in a county. (If agency representatives don't want to attend 2 meetings, it is essential that leadership collaborates to share information).

1. While VOAD (in the strict sense) consists of organizations that have some involvement with volunteers and stated the intention to participate in disaster relief, whether or not they are in the affected area. The main criteria for membership in the Network plans is regular delivery of service or resources in the community and this includes local government, private non profits, service clubs, church groups, etc. Focus is placed on survival of these organizations through training and preparation so that disruption can be minimized and services can be expanded to meet the disaster needs of the community.

Because of the grant funding available for full time staff and administration, the Network associations can accomplish a great deal. VOAD is run by the volunteer members and is largely a non operational vehicle for information sharing. There is no VOAD staff or budget to offer individual training and attention to all member organizations. Any VOAD effort that requires funding, can only be done through a "chipping in" collection which is very time consuming and not hugely successful.

2. In addition to the organizations with a local presence, VOAD membership includes national organizations that can be called in to help with resources and skilled volunteers (whether or not their organization has a local presence). Because the Network associations have minimal knowledge of potential disaster assistance from outside their area, this resource would not be maximized and if there was no VOAD connection.

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3. It was envisioned by the United Way that these networks would be able to continue functioning without external support, however it is unlikely that the same level of activity could be maintained without dedicated staff and a source of funding for training, printing, outreach, etc. Ultimately the capital investments of the Network funding may have to be utilized if there is a major earthquake in Northern California. In that event, hopefully VOAD will be able to serve as a coordinating vehicle and maintain the network that has been established. For that reason it is important that the two entities are linked and functioning to enhance each other's goals, which are ultimately the same - the reduction of suffering and loss caused by disaster.

At this time, there are only three Network associations that are functional **CADRE** (in Santa Clara County), **CARD** (in Alameda County) and **The San Francisco Inter Agency Disaster Preparation Coalition**. CARD is a newly funded project this year. The San Francisco group was originated 2 years ago with a great deal of support and encouragement from the San Francisco OES and has received its first network grant this year. It is an inspiring example of how local government can give voluntary agencies the tools to help prepare the population.

CADRE is currently in the 4th year of funding. The main goal is to prepare and organize service providers in Santa Clara County, so that they are better able to survive and meet the needs of their regular clientele, as well as additional needs created by the disaster. The other goal is to create a network of communication among these agencies to respond more effectively and share resources. Basic response activities are divided into Functions, which are coordinated through *Lead Agencies*. Functions include Clothing / Furniture, Communications, Counseling, Food, Housing, Information & Referral, Legal Assistance, Shelters, Storage, Translation/Interpretation, Transportation, & Volunteers. All participating agencies are categorized into one or more functional area, while the Lead Agency assesses and oversees the training plan for the agencies within its function. CADRE provides the training.

In Kind involves the functions of Clothing / Furniture, Food, Storage, and Transportation. Coordination of Food naturally fell to the local branch of Second Harvest Food Bank and the ARC agreed to head up Transportation, though there is no fleet of trucks. But it has been a problem from the beginning, to identify an agency wanting to be ultimately responsible for Clothing & Furniture or Storage. At various times in the last four years, Goodwill Industries, The Salvation Army, and St. Vincent de Paul have each accepted and then resigned the Function Lead.

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At this time, there is no Lead Agency and the written plan is under revision. The intention for dealing with non food In Kind donations is limited to working with overflow from County and City OES offices, and excess local offers to member agencies. Functioning only as a sort of centralized redistribution center, CADRE does not plan to release its phone number to the public or solicit donations of goods and materials. The CADRE Manager (working out of ARC, San Jose Chapter) will receive the offer/request to accept goods and contact the CADRE Operations Coordinator to see if any CADRE member is prepared to accept. The Transportation Coordinator is then notified to pick up the goods and deliver them to either the receiving agency or storage.

Some items that are not immediately needed can be stored in a "CADRE Corner" of the Moffet Field Warehouse available for ARC, on condition that CADRE volunteers are responsible for sorting and distribution. Volunteers will hopefully be sent by the Volunteer Exchange which is the lead agency for volunteer coordination and presumably trained by the Lead Storage Agency. However, at this time there is no Lead Storage Agency.

There is also no plan to deal with offers or unsolicited shipments arriving from outside the area. But one of the reasons that agencies or collaborations postpone or avoid serious disaster planning is the inability to come up with solid, comprehensive, all encompassing answers to every question. CADRE has achieved the most important aspect of a response plan: the local organizations have formed a "mutual assistance" mentality and have been made aware of many issues and options that had never occurred to them. While we should continue to strive for "a plan for every scenario", the inability to achieve this should not inhibit or frustrate community collaborations. Cooperative efforts should not be judged by their shortcomings, but by their progress in the direction of an effective community response network.

Of the three operational collaborations, CADRE has gone farthest in solidifying and refining the model. The plan would be the similar for the other nine planned Bay area groupings and ultimately a mutual aid agreement would be established among the territories.

Adventist Community Services (ACS)

In addition to having a very good disaster response program in place, the ACS is renown for dealing effectively with In Kind Donations. Within hours after the Loma Prieta Earthquake, the Pastor of the downtown Santa Cruz church was able to set up and operate a functional receiving and distribution center using only the written

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manual that he found in his office. He had no previous experience or training and no one was more surprised than he was when it worked.

ACS operates 2 large national warehouses which collect, process and distribute all types of clothing, furniture and equipment internationally to meet disaster related needs. One of these warehouses is located in Watsonville, and the other is in Baltimore. This warehouse is used to store goods processed and shipped from local collection and processing centers.

ACS has also established an 800 number which is published to accept offers after a disaster. This number is operated out of Andrews University in Michigan. Offers are logged in and potential donors are referred to an ACS representative, who will direct the offer to the appropriate local collection point or center.

Developments within the last 48 hours indicate new advances in In Kind coordination. In the current relief operation for Hurricane Marilyn, the FEMA 800 number is not activated and FEMA is referring all calls to the ARC 800 number. Adventist Community Services is also operating an 800 number. It is also my understanding that the Church of the Brethren has just opened a communal warehouse in Puerto Rico for all VOAD members to utilize.

St. Vincent de Paul and The Salvation Army

Since there are many representatives of these organizations here who are extremely knowledgeable in this area, I will only mention my experience in collaboration with donated goods. The immediate goal of the ARC is to replace urgently needed resources that were lost due to the disaster. But the guidelines cannot encompass every need that we see. More and more family service workers are learning that VOAD agencies can enhance each others efforts by communicating the special needs we see through open channels of communication.

These organizations have similar structures in as much as they have ongoing collection and distribution of In Kind Donations, both as revenue producing and charitable endeavors. In time of disaster, both organizations experience the same disruption of these operations. Much of the In Kind largesse that arrives unsolicited after a disaster is routed to these agencies, and it is often not in condition for immediate distribution. Therefore both organizations are forced to utilize their existing stock of goods and clothing that have been previously sorted, washed, sized, and repaired. This has a long term affect on their revenues, and if the donated items are used to

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replenish the stock, they run the risk of public anger for selling donations that were sent for the victims.

Interfaith's

Interfaith collaborations have been able to come the closest to a truly communal effort on processing and allocating In Kind Donations. They have the "advantage" of having no individual existing relief effort that must be modified to fit the collaboration. They also have the resource of trained outside consultants from CWS or CRWRC who come in solely for the purpose of offering guidance and tools to come together. They represent no single church or denomination, and have no agenda other than facilitating a collaboration that works for the community.

As previously stated, the FEMA 800 number was not activated in the Northern California Floods, and the ARC In Kind Function was active for only a brief period in the beginning. But the 3 Interfaith organizations that formed in Guerneville, Rio Linda, and Watsonville are still continuing to collect and distribute In Kind donations for the victims.

Obstacles to higher level coordination:

Some government agencies are ambivalent about working with voluntary agencies?

The difference in philosophy and procedures between government and voluntary agency disaster response becomes more pronounced when they "do business together" in a disaster. Often when requests are made to meet an urgent need, there is often no time to iron out the details and it is assumed that this will be done later. (We have all seen the anger of the public when bureaucracy puts its own needs before that of the disaster victims. "Business as usual" is unacceptable..) But when "later" comes, often the cooperative spirit and the sense of urgency of the moment are gone, and so are the people who originally made the request. For voluntary organizations "later" is when donations are tapering off, bills are still coming in, and everyone just wants to go home. For the government, "later" is when the Emergency Response team has been replaced by lawyers and accountants who are looking for verification and authorization.

Even though, within their perception, both originally acted responsibly and in good faith, it is easy for one or both parties to feel inconvenienced. For this reason, many government representatives are hesitant to give any real responsibility to a voluntary agency in their planing, let alone something as nebulous as VOAD. (The

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ARC with its national mandate and the Salvation Army with its history of service are often exceptions.)

Constant Communication & Timely Access to Information is essential

Things change quickly in disaster. Situations alter, resources materialize and disappear, programs and services start up and die out. Rapid sharing of accurate and up to date information is always one of the biggest challenges. It is almost impossible to print and distribute accurate resource lists at certain stages of an operation. By the time it is copied it is wrong. Meeting too frequently is a burden, telephone calls are time consuming and difficult, and many resources and opportunities come and go between weekly meetings.

The obvious simplification of this process would be instant electronic transmission of changes and updates. While **VOAD Net** has opened new doors, many organizations have not been utilizing it due to lack of funds, equipment, or technical expertise. Attempts have been made, but non users remain intimidated by the technology. They don't know exactly what the benefits would be, while they do know that it will take time and money. Therefore, VOAD Net (or something like it) needs a sponsor and focused energy within each organization to overcome the natural reluctance to new methods. Like every other improvement that allows us to be more effective in disaster relief, once people try it they like it.

Adding this service to the Internet is the next logical step. The Internet is quickly becoming a key form of communication for businesses and the general public. It can provide cost effective and efficient solutions to many of the problems we face in disaster communications. Internet access could have an immediate impact in the ability of VOAD to receive, screen, and allocate In Kind Offers.

For instance, VOAD information made available on an Internet access provider (i.e.: Compuserve, America Online) could inform the general public about our needs without them having to telephone the disaster area. The information would be clear, standardized, and simultaneously available to everyone. An "In Kind Offer" form could be used for donors to log information and offers. These could be screened and the donor contacted all without tying up staff and phone lines. It might even be reasonable to ask an Internet provider to contribute design and implementation support as a public service. The potential expansion of customer base and on line time would certainly make it worth their effort.

Pitfalls facing any agency dealing with unsolicited, miscellaneous donations from the public.

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1. *Items are sent that are not really practical for immediate use by the relief agencies or the victims.*
2. *When donor communities “take up collections” for the victims, often everything is brought to one place and loaded into a shipment of mixed goods that no one can relate to.*
3. *Unsolicited In Kind donations are sent off in the direction of the disaster with no clear destination and no knowledge of how to identify a willing recipient at the other end.*
4. *Even items that might have been utilized are packaged and shipped in such an unprofessional way that they cannot be identified, moved or stored easily.*
5. *Sanitation, safety, liability, and the expense of disposal are issues that squelch any desire for most agencies to venture into the area of unsolicited donations.*

Why educating the public is not as easy as it seems

When major disaster strikes, the emotional effects extend far beyond the physical. In proportion to the destruction and drama, the victims are experiencing fear, confusion and anxiety. At the same time, in proportion to media coverage, the part of the public feels sympathy and an urgent desire to help. Many people are driven to do something but very few people know anything about disaster relief and the needs of the victims. So they begin to send the things that they imagine the victims have lost, and they rent a truck or take it to their church to be delivered ASAP. They may start phoning (or even go the area) hoping they can help in some way, even though they have no agency affiliation and no training. Often when their offers of goods or help are not received with enthusiasm, their excitement turns to anger. People can see on TV that the victims are waiting desperately while they phone every agency they can think of, only to get busy signals or be put on hold, and no one will tell them how they can help or where they should send a box of used children's clothing. Suggestions that they send money or enroll in training to be of use next time are not always well received.

Like disaster preparation, educating the public on In Kind donations can be frustrating. It is difficult to get their attention before the disaster and it is difficult to get their attention after the disaster. But we should continue trying, even though progress can be measured only in the things that don't happen in the future.

Two publications are available which can be of great help in educating the public on “do's and don'ts” as well as helping them to understand that they can actually hinder the relief effort if they do not offer their resources to the right place at the right time. “*How to Help - A Donor's Guide to Disaster Relief in the Bay Area*” is

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produced by the ARC. FEMA's Public Awareness Document #1, "Guidelines for Sending In Kind Donations to Disaster Victims" is a one page handout that clarifies the main issues.

(Public Awareness Document #2 on the other side is "*Guidelines for Volunteer Service*" - equally as useful).

New Tax Laws

The value of certain types of In Kind donations has always been difficult to quantify. This makes record keeping difficult and allows the obvious potential for abuse in tax reporting. New tax laws require non profits to account for certain types of In Kind and document their use. While most of our donations are merely passed on to the disaster victim, a new level of accountability is required. Non profits who want to protect their tax exempt status must keep informed of these requirements before opening the doors to massive In Kind resource transfers.

Benefits and Obstacles to Inter-agency Collaboration

Among the VOAD members there is certainly the expertise and possibly the resources to receive, process, and distribute or dispose of almost any type of materials. Much of the waste, confusion and aggravation could be eliminated (or at least spread out) through a more centralized inter-agency collaboration. Basically what we have now is what we have always had, a group of organizations who have:

- **various independent policies regarding the acceptance and utilization of unsolicited In Kind Donations.**

These plans have become more sophisticated in recent years, but basically each one is designed around the organizations needs and capabilities, with little consideration or detailed knowledge of the other organizations' plans. They naturally center on maximizing In Kind donations of the materials the organization can use and minimizing the time and resources spent dealing with things they can't use.

- **the common goal of maximizing resources to the disaster victim and facilitating the recovery process.**

It can safely be said that all VOAD members would like to see as much as possible of the In Kind donations make its way to victims (or anyone) who will benefit. However each organization comes to a disaster to participate in certain aspects in the relief and recovery and it is their job to focus on performing their part efficiently. It might not be considered appropriate to devote excessive resources to making sure that each donation gets to an organization that will be able to use it.

- **national agreements or local understandings to refer unwanted or excess In Kind donations to other organizations.**

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This often means that as a courtesy callers are told, "No we can't use your offer, but have you tried _____?" This is often done with little discrimination or knowledge of whether the other agency might be interested so it is questionable whether or not it is a courtesy.

- **national agreements or local understandings to refer clients to other organizations for additional assistance.**

One of the greatest advantages to interagency collaboration is the ability to know that clients will have access the resources that your organization is unable to supply, and knowing that other agencies are informed on your services and resources. Disaster victims can be saved making the rounds and telling their stories over and over trying to locate the resources they need.

- **varying capabilities and resources in different locales.**

Naturally organizations who have existing facilities and local staff can be of more help than those who come in from outside and have to set up. Being a member of VOAD is like visiting a place where you have a relative instead of trying to make connections with total strangers on arrival.

What still we do not have is:

- **A centralized screening and referral system that actually deals with the offer conclusively.**

Instead several entities have set up the capability to receive and possibly accept wanted offers. Callers with unwanted offers are given the numbers of other agencies and told to see if they were interested. No one wants to be inconsiderate or disrespectful of fellow relief agencies or donors, they just want to get rid of the caller as quickly and politely as possible without offending them. Everyone knows that this practice ties up the phone lines, frustrates the donors, and drastically reduces the credibility of any list of offers, because callers will persist in making their offer until it is finally accepted.

- **staff and resources to log and publicize lists of available materials**

Logging unwanted offers and their terms of acceptance efficiently enough to eliminate the need for repeated repetitive communications is a time consuming and specialize skill.

- **resources to intentionally accept shipments they cannot use, just to get them out of the way until they can find a willing recipient.**

The FEMA listing of offers has gone a long way to spread information about offers to organizations that would otherwise be unable to access resources. Many local, little known organizations deplete their resources at the same time that their normal fund sources are diverted to disaster relief. Although FEMA's policy is to deal largely

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with known VOAD members, other active agencies can tap in through community coordination meetings.

Continued

Opportunities for VOAD

It would be a wonderful opportunity for a VOAD or Interfaith to be able to take over the FEMA 800 number function, but it could mean a great deal of clean-up work with very little return. In the first few days after Loma Prieta, the San Jose Red Cross received thousands of calls from people offering every conceivable type of accommodation, donation, and service. In the first week, many people repeatedly called the ARC, the Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul, the Mayor, and their Congressman to see why no one was responding to their offer. We were not prepared to document or even answer these calls and lines were completely tied up. Operators only had time to take names, phone numbers and one word about what was offered.

When things quieted down, a team of volunteers was formed to try to call everyone back, clarify the offer, thank them, and see about the current status of the offer. The large majority of callers took the opportunity to tell the volunteers that they would never forget how shabbily they had been treated and how the ARC had stood between the victims and the people who were trying to help them. Many people had waited by the phone for hours and days to be called back and told where to report or deliver their donation.

Summary

Non-profit and voluntary agencies do not normally have large budgets or excess resources to spend in planning for disaster. Our strength lies in our ability to build on each other's experience, our common goals and our need to help each other succeed. Well managed, well directed In Kind donations from the public and business communities will allow us to maximize resource flow to the disaster victim in an economic period when we may be facing reduced government assistance and cash inflow. The challenge is to maintain enough flexibility to adjust, as a group, to increasing changes in disaster related needs and types of resources available to fill them.

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What would be needed:

Secure Space-close enough for access, far enough to be out of the way and not affected.

CBO's to distribute

local gov support - security, communications, sanitization

In Kind can possibly be thanked for encouraging (forcing) organizations to become more knowledgeable and coordinate better with each other. While money can be used for any purpose, durable goods are not so flexible and require time money and energy to transport, store and distribute or dispose of. Waste is eliminated on several levels by directing them efficiently from the beginning. NVOAD has enabled relief agencies to make vast improvements in resource sharing and cooperation. Most organizations now have a plan to utilize as much as possible and divert unsolicited and unwanted In Kind to an appropriate recipient. However as things pile up, there are increasing amounts of things that no one can handle being "diverted" from place to place. There is no "last stop" because no sane organization would make an open ended offer to receive everything that no one else wants. So even with all the discussions, the chaos continues. We have a plan to deal with everything but the inevitable.

FEMA has accumulated a great deal of knowledge about In Kind through experience gathered in many different types of disasters. Several years ago, FEMA entered into a collaboration with to create a data base to capture some of the many offers that are received in the first weeks after a disaster.

This is not because FEMA is incapable of making this improvement. Rather it is not FEMA's intention to be operating an ongoing centralized service for donors and agencies.

The 3 main purposes of FEMA's Donation Policy can be summarized as follows:

- 1. Support State & local governments and voluntary agencies in establishing a system to manage and control unsolicited goods and services in the event of a major disaster.**

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2. Provide a centralized and efficient method for the general public to communicate their offers.
3. Support the concept of an overall donations management strategy.

Before a donation is logged, callers are informed of the VOAD agencies accepting donations and given information on how to reach them. If the caller indicates a choice, the donation is not logged in and they are expected to call and make their offer directly to the other agency. If they are unsure, the offer is logged and they are told how to find an appropriate recipient next time. This might ultimately have the affect of reducing the calls to FEMA as donors are matched with recipients, but it also might increase the tendency of donors to call every number, looking for someone that will give them "immediate gratification". Every agency documenting calls will have the same offers logged and a great deal of the better offers will be gone by the time the information is reviewed and acted on.

The FEMA Printout is produced daily, but After Northridge, Dave Vargo began by faxing the list on request, but within one week he was giving out 60 copies of list. A FEMA representative arranged for VITA to help with the distribution by sending broadcast faxes from Arlington to all agencies with faxes, from day 15 to day 30 (closing). Copies then only had to be made for new agencies and meetings. The information was E-mailed in FEMA system to the DFO where it could be transferred into an ASCII file and stored on a computer disk for distribution as an alternative to the printout. FEMA also has a home page on internet where narrative sitreps are available to authorized recipients. Maybe the next step will be that VOAD agencies can enroll to access the donations list on the internet daily from the comfort of their own headquarters.

After Hurricane Andrew, FEMA had asked each state to write an addendum to their Disaster Plan to address the issue of In Kind Donations. California has not done this, and while there have been internal discussions on the issue, the 2 page memo is the only written document that has been released to date. Because there is no intention of soliciting or utilizing In Kind Donations in the State Disaster Response, this memo does not contain any details of action plans. It covers only the channels of information & communication, which is from the bottom up, based on SEMS (the California Standardized Emergency Management Plan. City

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governments are to request assistance from the County and the County government in turn can ask the State, if it is unable to fulfill its territorial obligations. The Voluntary Agencies are expected to go through the channel of City and county governments in order to make a request of the State.

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Suggestions

E Mail

Separate types of In Kind-food, clothing, household goods, furniture, bldg materials

Grid

John Marola, the Director of CSTI (California Specialized Training Institute) offered a session to create an In Kind Training Plan, but it was largely attended by Training Professionals rather than people with experience in In Kind after disaster. Like many aspects of disaster work, In Kind has so many potential pitfalls and variations that a workshop cannot be approached as "information that should be learned" such as SIMS or ICS. It almost has to be conveyed by someone who has undergone "trial by fire".

Materials that must be obtained quickly, often from several sources may be a mixture of completely free, goods donated but delivery billed, sold at cost or wholesale price, or full price. Specific skilled services that are requisitioned quickly may be volunteered, time volunteered but T&M expected, or full salary required. And when they are pulled from outside medical facilities or government constituencies, should the facility be reimbursed, or the person paid? Who is insuring them and who is requesting?

Within that framework, I have outlined information from the various organizations that are most involved in this area and what has been planned around minimal State participation. Those VOAD members who have not learned the hard way, have at least been able to benefit from the experience of others, and a great deal of attention has been put to avoiding the problems that come with In Kind.

LA County thinking of setting up 800 number. Can get direct referrals from FEMA in addition. to ARC, SA, SDA If not, why not send the calls directly to FEMA?

no fema 800 for cal floods, LA floods, only this year for Oklahoma city for short time. OK state established own 800# immed

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List on internet worldwide web and agencies can access file from FEMA home page

There is a second reason that has dampened the ARC from enthusiasm in accepting even attractive offers of bulk items that could be passed directly on to the victims. This is the policy of equal service - that everyone meeting the same criteria must be given exactly the same thing. This is a little confusing to the public, because clearly every victim entering a Service Center on Day 5 after a disaster does not leave with exactly the same assistance. Factors such as insurance, family make-up, age, alternate resources, (and ability of the victim to convey their needs) etc. enter into the level of assistance offered. But presumably 2 people in the same circumstances would receive the same help. But if on Day 5 a company offers 2000 teddy bears to be given to the children of the victims, it could not be accepted for 2 reasons. The criteria for receiving bears would be only to be a child and to have parents come into the center and there would be no way to assure that there would be enough bears for all the children coming in. Alternate bears or toys could not be used to fill in any gaps because they would be different. Even if there were sufficient supplies for everyone, the children who had come in before the arrivals of the bears would not receive them and therefore all later arrivals could not. The ARC Service Centers and shelters are a very good distribution point because the majority of victims pass through at some point. This is very frustrating because it would seem that this policy actually prevents resources from getting to the victims.

Sometimes this issue was skirted by referring the donation to another VOAD agency and then sending the victims over there to receive a teddy bear. This is also not the easiest distribution method for the victims or the other agency, but it does work.