

# Recovering From Disasters

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## Long term thinking:

- When it comes to long-term recovery, anchor organizations are critical for success. Identify who these anchor organizations are on the front end, and include them in the recovery process as early as possible. The federal government is great at collecting data, developing reports and recommendations, and coordinating complex issues. However, you have to set communities up for success when the federal government leaves. It will be those anchor organizations that can help translate the data and recommendations in to action. Otherwise, local capacity will be overwhelmed and communities will default back to old ways of conducting business that is isolated from any of the lessons learned during the recovery period.
- Also, get organizations to make a specific commitment within the long-term recovery plan. When I receive a plan that has been produced by EDA or FEMA and it has my name, my organization, and what we have committed to do in that plan, and then it is circulated all over my region, I am going to take that commitment seriously.
- Disasters can be an opportunity to implement long-term change. That starts with exposing local leaders to fresh ways of thinking. In Faulkner County, I noticed three examples of where new ways of thinking have changed the landscape permanently (those these surely aren't the only examples):
  1. Jump Start Initiative—first time for zoning, first time to think about mixed use development, connectivity, and first time to dream about a different kind of built environment.
  2. Funding for recovery coordinator and his administrative assistants is the first time the county has had a paid staff to help with ED. It's hard to take that away once you've had a taste. I have heard that at least one of the communities is now considering having a full time paid staff member whose job will be ED. In these rural communities, there is usually not a paid ED person. There may be a part time chamber person and their capacity is low because of lack of time, resources, experience, or training. Having a committed ED person would be a breakthrough. One year out, we are probably moving from "tornado recovery" to "economic development" as our mind set.
  3. At least one community is discussing the formation of a CDO at the local level. By benchmarking against another community that had been through disaster

recovery, the local citizens and leaders realized that an informal citizen organization would not be sustainable for long term development initiatives.

**Work smarter not harder:**

- Need one point person (like David Dodd) to have critical one-on-one conversations with stakeholders. There is only so much that can get done in a large group setting such as the coordination meetings. If I had not been personally, privately approached to brainstorm my involvement, been given a deeper understanding of the moving pieces of the recovery and the organizations that were involved, and heard directly about existing needs and where I might plug in, I would not have committed funding and programmatic assistance.
- Many times organizations will have a plan or work that—if slightly tweaked—would be a natural fit for long-term recovery efforts. For example—Connect Arkansas, a nonprofit committed to broadband access and utilization, was going to do an assessment for small businesses in Arkansas to determine how effectively they were utilizing the internet within their operations. Then, 100 businesses were going to get individualized plans of action on how to better utilize the internet to strengthen their business operations. They were going to do this anyways, it had nothing to do with tornado recovery. So we were able to approach them and say, “focus your efforts on Faulkner County first”. They did, and over 40 businesses received customized reports and recommendations to improve their business operations within Faulkner County.

My shop already had plans to develop regional economic development training opportunities within the state. We have received private foundation funding to begin this work in May. We were going to do this anyways, and it had nothing to do with the tornado. Because I was asked, I am piloting the program in Faulkner County. Now this program will be replicated state-wide. Work smarter—not harder. We aren't trying to reinvent the wheel, and we don't always need new or more resources. We just need to guide existing programs and resources through our 'recovery funnel'.