

## **MENDOCINO-ROC**

## Successes, Lessons and Gaps

The Community Foundation is Chair of Mendocino-Rebuilding Our Community (M-ROC), the long-term fire recovery committee for the Redwood Complex Fires of October 2017. Mendocino-ROC developed its infrastructure based on the National Voluntary Organizations Active in a Disaster (NVOAD) model. Following an open invitation to the community, along with direct recruitment with partner organizations, M-ROC formed into eight committees: the Steering Committee, Finance & Fundraising Committee, Unmet Needs Committee, Emotional & Spiritual Support Committee, Material Donations Committee, Construction & Housing Committee, Case Management Committee and People Helping People Committee. These committees are coordinated through a single M-ROC Project Manager and work closely with case management to serve the needs of fire survivors. Committee membership draws from local and national organizations as well as individuals and professionals. Mendocino-ROC core leadership comes from the Community Foundation, North Coast Opportunities (NCO) and the County of Mendocino.

**Infrastructure:** One of our greatest successes comes from building a strong infrastructure from the beginning. This includes securing grant funding to cover staffing costs for a Project Manager and Case Managers. These two roles are our only current paid positions and our system couldn't succeed without their active dedication.

**Partnership:** Establishing a strong partnership with the County of Mendocino and North Coast Opportunities (NCO) has been critical to our success. The County partnership has strengthened our ties in the community, offered a two-way dialogue into recovery efforts, and lent critical knowledge, skills and resources to the development of our Case Management system. NCO has shared with us their wisdom, given their leadership on the fire recovery in Lake County three years running, as well as serving as a fiscal agent to disburse funds to individuals.

Grants to Survivors: Creating a tiered system of grants to disburse funds out to survivors in a way that encourages planning into long-term housing solutions has resulted in broad support that removes barriers for those most in need. A variety of grant opportunities allows for options regardless of income or vulnerability, so everyone has a way to receive help, while larger grants focus on the most vulnerable. Small grants can restore a sense of normalcy (Kids Activity Fund, Senior Respite, Animal Habitats); mid-size grants can remove a barrier to housing or return a survivor to work (Critical Needs Grants up to \$3k); large housing grants fill the gap to return survivors to long-term housing by assisting with the cost of building supplies or the purchase of a home.

**Equity and Vulnerability**: With limited funds it has been critical that we keep an eye towards equity and vulnerability. Our Case Managers developed a thoughtful vulnerability index that allows us to serve those most in need, while retaining an eye towards equity to ensure all survivors can receive some form of help.

**Local Engagement**: By building a homegrown proprietary database used by Case Management, filling staff and committee roles with local individuals, and having strong partnerships with community organizations has created a strong sense of 'neighbors helping neighbors' which has proven effective and builds trust with fire survivors.

**Diversity**: By utilizing a diverse staff and committee membership we have been able to lean on the strengths of local organizations and individuals to our greatest benefit. Case Managers have diverse social, cultural and professional backgrounds (including strong administrative skills, planning and building knowledge, mortgage and lending acumen); committee members represent a broad number of organizations both professional, spiritual along with individuals. This has strengthened our overall ability to problem solve and access critical resources.

**Don't Wait:** We spent a brief time waiting for the cavalry to arrive, having heard that national and spiritual organizations tend to swoop in after a disaster to help solve the problems. Our successes are rooted in the fact that we built our own 'homegrown' system, with guidance but not leadership from outside organizations.

**Immediate Emotional Support:** We now provide small grants to cover the cost of 10-sessions of one-on-one therapy to fire survivors. We first tried a number of different approaches (support groups, etc) before discovering this is the most effective way to offer support.

**Multiple Solutions:** We discovered the value of creating multiple solutions to different issues. Housing has been our greatest challenge, and partnership with a volunteer labor-based organization has been critical to our ability to help. In retrospect we realize we needed to bolster both that organization's capacity to do the work, while developing a multipronged approach to providing housing solutions.

**Communications & Events:** We have streamlined our communications through our Project Manager after attempting a communications committee. While a committee seems wise conceptually, in reality it wasn't a nimble enough system to meet our needs. Having a dedicated individual who manages communications has proven best. We also didn't create an events committee, and instead this function has fallen to a few individuals and committees. Having an established events committee from the beginning could have solved some issues.

**Ongoing Fundraising:** The bulk of giving is done during and immediately following the disaster. We continue to seek pathways to secure ongoing donations.

**Renter Community:** Our community lacks rentals; the fires made the housing market even more challenging for the over 160 rental families that lost homes. We continue to develop systems and funding streams to help renters get back on their feet.

**Emotional Trauma:** The community at large, and the fire survivors specifically, have experienced immense trauma from the fires. Our Emotional & Spiritual Support Committee (ESSC) has made gains in providing pathways to support, however certain populations continue to be a struggle to reach (such as male survivors). We also face re-traumatization with new fires impacting the same region, needing an effective support system that can be quickly implemented.

