The Development and Pilot Testing of the ENGAGED Toolkit

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Toolkit Purpose

Recent strategies, such as the United States' National Health Security Strategy and National Disaster Recovery Framework, as well as policy documents generated by the International Red Cross and the SPHERE Project, have emphasized the importance of engaging organizations outside the government on disaster response and recovery. Still, there is no official policy, documentation, or guidance for how nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) should lead or work with government through the disaster response and recovery phases.[1] Further, there is limited international guidance on the role of NGOs in disaster response and recovery. While NGOs provide critical social, economic, and health services, there is evidence to suggest that their effectiveness could be enhanced if the relevant organizations were more formally engaged in recovery efforts and better integrated into planning at the local and state levels.

Since 2013, the RAND Corporation has partnered with the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development (CASTED) to explore the role of NGOs (specifically, voluntary associations; philanthropic organizations, such as foundations and donor organizations; advocacy groups; community groups; and businesses) in China and the United States in disaster response and recovery. The Ford Foundation funded RAND and CASTED to identify the key assets and skills of NGOs and to develop a toolkit (the Enabling NonGovernmental Agencies to Get Engaged in Disasters, or ENGAGED, Toolkit) to facilitate more-reliable and more-effective NGO involvement in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

The toolkit assists public health and emergency planners and NGO stakeholders (including international aid organizations, in-country organizations, philanthropic organizations, and businesses) in determining the capacity and capability of particular NGOs for disaster response and recovery.

In addition, the toolkit fills an important gap in knowledge and understanding about the key elements that drive NGO participation. Although participation from NGOs is critical, leveraging these actors has been highly variable across communities, and in many cases, organizations that compose this sector face inadequate policy and financial support to participate effectively (Cutter et al., 2006; Waugh, 2006; Chandra & Acosta, 2009; Acosta, Chandra, Sleeper, & Springgate, 2011; Moore, Chandra, & Feeney, 2013). With increasing disasters in both the United States and China (e.g., 2013 U.S. tornados, Hurricane Sandy, and the 2010 and 2013 earthquakes in southwest China), having tools to support engagement of these voluntary, social, and philanthropic NGOs is critical because they are instrumental contributors to disaster response and recovery efforts.

Methods Used to Develop the Toolkit

To develop the ENGAGED toolkit, we used two methods:
1) literature review, which included synthesis from prior RAND analyses, as well as a literature search

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[1] For the purposes of this toolkit, we refer to disasters as both natural disasters (such as hurricanes, floods, and tornados) and complex humanitarian disasters (such as oil spills, nuclear disasters, and displaced populations).

2) key informant interviews and focus groups with organizations in the United States to capture their roles and expectations for NGOs and to understand where opportunities for more robust engagement may exist.

These methods helped identify the dimensions of NGO engagement that contribute to successful disaster response and recovery, as well as NGO capacities and capabilities in need of improvement for optimal engagement in disaster response and recovery.

We then used the information collected through these two methods (i.e., the dimensions of NGO engagement and areas in which NGOs need to improve) to develop a storyboard and draft the toolkit content. Once a draft was developed, we pilot tested the toolkit in three communities in the United States. In this section, we briefly describe how each method informed the final toolkit's design and content. The subsequent section focuses on the pilot test.

Note that throughout the development of the toolkit (2012–2016), we engaged with CASTED partners to develop our methods and share our findings from the literature review and interviews to review the findings from the CASTED team's interviews with Chinese civil society organizations (the term used to describe NGOs in China). While our two projects were conducted independently, we partnered and shared our work to ultimately inform the development of a toolkit that can be used in both countries.

RAND and CASTED worked together to:
- identify the key cultural and societal elements driving social participation in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery in the United States and China, and create a conceptual model (see Acosta & Chandra, 2013)
- use this conceptual model to guide the development of the toolkit.

Once a draft of the toolkit was developed, RAND then:

- conducted a pilot test of the draft toolkit to identify the key steps for stakeholders to use the tool in practice
- conducted a survey of NGOs in the United States to determine whether there is empirical evidence to support the conceptual model used to guide the development of the toolkit.

Survey findings will be shared in a future publication. This document focuses on findings from the pilot test of the toolkit. Although CASTED is also conducting a pilot test of the draft toolkit with communities in China and running a similar survey with NGOs in China, this document highlights only RAND contributions and focuses more exclusively on U.S. communities. As of February 2016, CASTED was still completing its pilot test and survey. Once CASTED completes its work, the findings from both the United States and China can be further integrated.

Literature Review

To inform the development of the toolkit, we first conducted an analysis of peer-reviewed literature (covering disasters across the globe), relevant U.S. policy, and federal guidance to characterize the capabilities of NGOs, contextual factors that determine their involvement in disaster operations, and the key services NGOs provide during disaster response and recovery. To identify peer-reviewed literature, we identified articles from 2000 or later using a title search of Medline (PubMed) and PsychInfo databases. Search terms included nongovernment* or nonprofit or faith-based or business or community-based AND disaster or resilience or preparedness or emergency or mitigation. We also

reviewed the following recent policy documents to identify NGO roles as outlined in current policy and federal guidance: the National Health Security Strategy, National Security Strategy, National Disaster Recovery Framework, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 21, Grand Challenges for Disaster Reduction, All-Hazard Risk Mitigation Plan, Department of Health and Human Services' Pandemic Influenza Plan, and Federal Emergency Management Agency's Whole Community Engagement Strategy. From each document, we cataloged content (e.g., type of study, data collection method, analytic approach, and a summary of key findings), the unique capabilities of NGOs referenced in each citation (e.g., flexibility), determinants of involvement in disaster operations (e.g., financial considerations), services that NGOs provided during disaster response and recovery (e.g., shelter, food), and how these key services differed for routine and emergency times. The catalogue of data abstraction form contents was synthesized into a single list of unique capabilities, determinants, and services for routine and emergency times.

Findings from the literature review were used to inform the development of an operational model describing NGO involvement in disaster (see Figure 1 later in this document) and focused on the following four interrelated areas:

- the current policy landscape supporting partnerships among NGOs and between NGOs and government, as well as the common challenges to developing and leveraging these partnerships
- capabilities and determinants of NGO capacity to respond to disaster
- services offered by NGOs, as well as their roles and responsibilities both during routine operations and during disaster response and recovery
- the potential long-term benefits of involving NGOs in disaster response and recovery, which include building NGO capacity and encouraging ongoing community development.

Details on how the literature, policy, and guidance documents were reviewed and key information abstracted, as well as key findings from the literature review, are contained in Acosta and Chandra (2013).

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups

To learn more about NGOs' experience in disaster response and recovery, the RAND team conducted six 90-minute focus groups (n=55) or 45-minute qualitative interviews (n=21; for those unable to attend the focus group) with NGO and governmental stakeholders commonly involved in disaster response and recovery efforts in the United States. Stakeholders included individuals representing local government (e.g., city managers), faith-based organizations (e.g., Catholic charities), nonprofits (e.g., Red Cross, United Way), long-term recovery committees, community foundations, businesses (e.g., Walmart, chamber of commerce representatives), emergency management (e.g., Federal Emergency Management Agency), first responders (e.g., fire, police), health and health care (e.g., hospitals), public health (e.g., local health departments), and coalitions of NGOs (e.g., local voluntary organizations active in disaster [VOADs]). We selected six sites that have recently experienced a disaster: Joplin, Missouri (two focus groups, n=13; interviews, n=9); New York, New York (interviews, n=4); Mobile, Alabama (one focus group, n=11; interview, n=1); Birmingham, Alabama (one focus group, n=13; interviews, n=6); Biloxi, Mississippi (one focus group, n=9; interview, n=1); and New Orleans, Louisiana (one focus group, n=9). Key stakeholders at each site were selected through consultation with a key informant at each site. Interviewees included a diverse array of civil society (volunteer, community-based, business, and philanthropic organizations).

The CASTED team conducted its own interviews with NGOs in China. To facilitate cross-country lessons learned, we developed the interview and focus group protocol in partnership with CASTED so that we could both use the same protocol when talking with NGOs. The protocol focused on these questions:

- How are NGOs used in disasters? What roles do they play? Do they plan for a role or is their participation ad hoc? What motivates their participation?

- What have been successful roles for NGOs? What areas have presented challenges, and why?

- How have NGOs been integrated into response and recovery plans? How is this coordinated, linked, and resourced?

- How has the response of NGOs varied by type of disaster, previous local disaster experiences, or other relevant factors? Can we distill core roles or elements across disasters?

- What data exist on the benefits of involving NGOs in disaster response and recovery? Can we identify proximal outcomes (e.g., active involvement of NGOs in disaster planning) that mediate or predict the success of NGOs in disaster response and recovery?

Answers were then distilled to identify how NGOs are engaged and involved in disaster response and recovery efforts, the facilitating factors and challenges to involvement, the resources that the organizations rely on, and the overall benefits of their involvement in such efforts (both those that occur sequentially before a disaster response and recovery and, preferably, those that occur on a regular basis to allow for routine monitoring of these outcomes and those that mediate or predict the success of NGOs in disaster response and recovery).

The following key themes surfaced from the U.S. interviews:
- Some of the key factors that facilitate NGO engagement include:
  - trust among NGOs, and trust between NGOs and government agencies
  - having the leadership of the NGO invested in disaster response and recovery and in collaboration
  - having incentives (both fiscal and nonfiscal) to help ease NGO participation
  - ensuring prepositioned plans for financing and coordination in advance of the disaster
  - having clear plans that guide response coordination and recovery operations
  - believing in the reliability ("you can count on") of NGOs to engage effectively in response and recovery operations.
- During recovery, in particular, factors that facilitated NGO engagement include:
  - setting communitywide recovery goals that included a defined role for NGOs
  - using social media to recruit volunteers that support the work of NGOs and the overall community recovery.
- Some of the factors that improved coordination among NGOs include:
  - a multi-agency warehouse for supplies that allowed coordination across all points of dispensing
  - strong community organizations active in disaster that were connected to regional and state VOADs (two U.S. models for engaging NGOs in disaster)
  - a Charity Tracker, which allowed for tracking donated goods and individual assistance.
- We also learned that some of the critical barriers that continue to impede effective NGO participation include:
  - challenges in communication among NGOs and between these organizations and government agencies (e.g., in the United States, there is no common convener to coordinate information exchange)

- o difficulties with trust and conflicting perspectives on particular NGO reliability
- o difficulties balancing disaster response and recovery against usual NGO operations
- o challenges in financing and reimbursement
- o confusion about roles and responsibilities of NGOs in recovery
- o lack of centralized information about clients who access multiple services, leading to concerns over duplication.

Key issues that emerged from the interviews with Chinese civil society organizations were similar to the U.S. findings. They included:

- lack of information about what each civil society organization does, what assets each brings, and how resources are shared
- little information on how government should work with civil society organizations
- difficulty determining equity in resource identification and sharing
- difficulty determining when and how certain types of organizations should engage across the disaster cycle
- confusion about the types of needs in education, social welfare, health, environmental, legal, and other disaster relief requirements and what organization should do.

The analysis of literature and key informant interviews and focus groups informed a final operational model (Figure 1), which we originally published in Acosta and Chandra (2013). This model served as the foundational framework for ENGAGED and is intended to be applicable in both the United States and China. We also integrated some of the key findings from the CASTED team's interviews with Chinese civil society organizations, which we briefly summarize in the next section. ENGAGED was designed to help NGOs (or civil society organizations) apply this model by assessing their capacity and capabilities noted here.

## Operational Model for Involving NGOs in Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

The following is an excerpt from Acosta and Chandra (2013) explaining the operational model:

> [The NGO operational model is based on four inter-related key areas.] The first area describes the current policy landscape supporting partnerships between NGOs and government agencies and among NGOs and the common challenges to developing and leveraging these partnerships. The second area indicates the capabilities and determinants of NGO capacity to respond to disaster. The third area describes the services offered by NGOs and their roles and responsibilities. This area in particular helps define the underlying premise of the model—that NGOs should be involved to provide their routine services more quickly and to a greater and broader population during a disaster. The fourth area underscores the importance of involving NGOs in disaster response and recovery for potential long-term benefits, including building NGO capacity and encouraging ongoing community development.
>
> The Figure shows how these components are woven into the model. Key NGO capabilities include their knowledge of local needs and assets developed over time through their relationships with other NGOs. Other determinants of their capacity influence involvement in delivering routine and disaster-related activities, such as financial (asset level, reimbursement) and social responsibility (mission, motivations). When a disaster affects a community, NGOs apply their capabilities and accelerate the delivery of services to accommodate new community needs. They are not asked to conduct new services or assume new responsibilities but to increase their efforts by providing more

services faster and to a broader population. During disaster recovery, NGOs continue providing services and begin transitioning families back into the routine service delivery system (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). As part of continued community development, these improvements can stimulate economic recovery, improve service delivery for future disasters, and provide general strengthening of resilience. Lessons learned about what worked and what failed during a disaster can also provide critical information to further enhance NGOs capacity. (pp. 362–363)

Figure 1. Operational Model for Involving NGOs in Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery
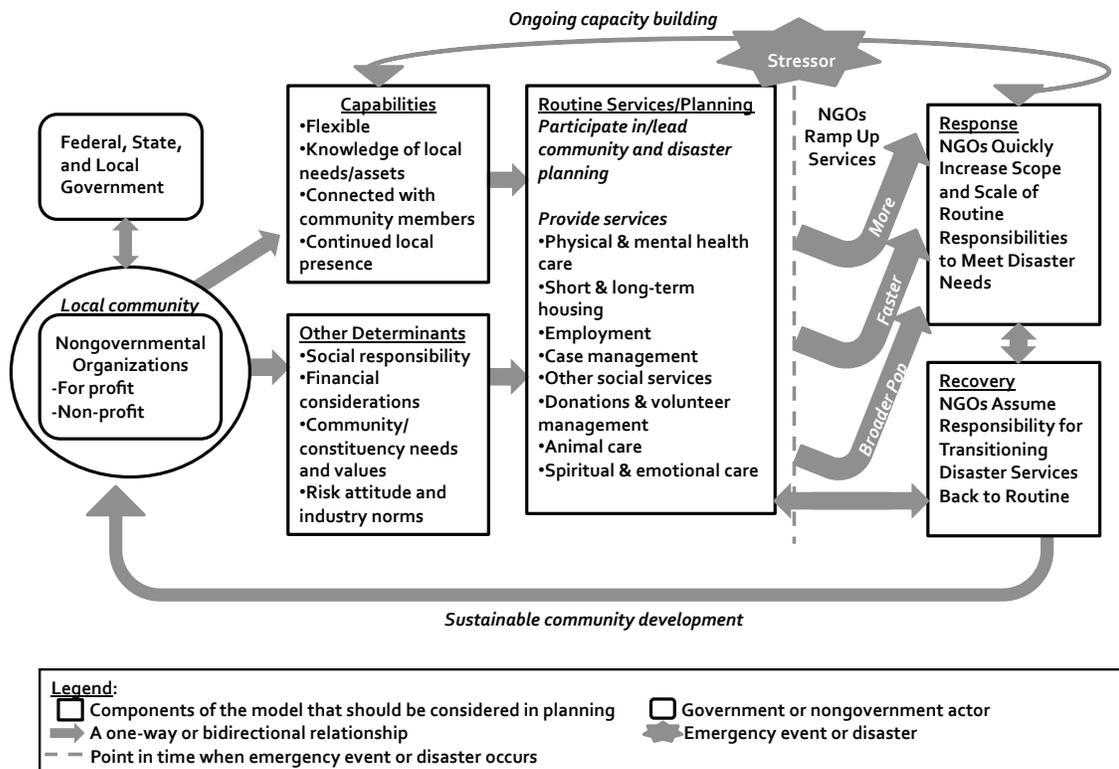
Based on these findings and the recommendations of key informants, we identified some priority elements that should be included in the toolkit. These elements will support the facilitators of NGO involvement and address challenges identified through the literature review and interviews/focus groups. The priority elements are as follows:

- Reflection on the *historical context* of NGO engagement during disaster. Key informants discussed how historical context influences credibility and potential contributions of NGOs. In order to fully understand the factors that influence an NGO's current ability to contribute to a community's disaster response and recovery operations, planners and NGOs must first reflect on historical involvement and the implications of past successes and failures. This includes a discussion of past partnerships, as well as the social, cultural, and political context of the community.
- Better definitions of the *roles and responsibilities* of NGOs. Both the literature and key informants described the challenges caused by NGOs' poorly defined roles and responsibilities and underscored the need for a tool to help NGOs (1) better articulate their core service areas, as well as the key government and NGO partners they will rely on (or that rely on them) during a

disaster, and (2) better integrate these roles and responsibilities into organizational and community plans.

- Better identification of the *assets* that NGOs bring to disaster response and recovery operations and improved communication of those to other NGOs and government partners. NGOs have provided key services, competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills, expertise), resources, equipment, and data and act as a broker for key relationships needed for disaster response and recovery (Acosta, Chandra, & Ringel, 2013). Both the literature and key informants indicated a need for organizations to improve their understanding of the assets they bring to the table, and ensure that they are reflected in organizational and community plans.

- Improved *communication* between an NGO (and its employees and constituents) and other NGO and government partners. Both the literature and key informants identified the breakdown of communication both before and during disaster response and recovery operations as a major barrier to NGO involvement. To address this barrier, key informants suggested identifying key communication channels, developing a systematic process for communicating with partners and tracking employees/constituents, and integrating these components into organizational and community plans.

- More emphasis on the *long-term commitment* of NGOs. Given the length and complexity of disasters, key informants recommended that the tool help NGOs think critically about how disaster recovery operations may overlap with or influence routine services, where there are opportunities for funding long-term services and supports, and what their benchmarks for success over the long term may be.

We used these findings to map out core features of the toolkit and create a first draft. Those core features include:

- an organizational profile for NGOs to identify their focus, scope, and contact information
- a self-assessment of skills needed for disaster engagement focused on roles and responsibilities, assets, communication, and long-term recovery
- an assessment of the historical context for NGO engagement
- an improvement-planning template for organizations to improve their skills and for NGO networks to improve their partnerships with each other and with government organizations.

U.S. Pilot Test of the Toolkit

Once the draft toolkit was developed, we engaged two communities with recent disaster experience and interest in improving NGO engagement in disaster to pilot test and assess the toolkit (Albuquerque, New Mexico, n=23; Miami, Florida, n=20). In each community, we held a workshop with community leaders representing the diversity of NGOs, including those that had experience with disaster response (e.g., fire departments, forestry organizations, universities) and those with experience supporting social, economic, ecological, or other human services (e.g., credit unions, soup kitchens, humane societies). Participants were led through aspects of the draft toolkit to test how each component worked out in a practical or applied setting with real users, and then how the toolkit could be used as a whole.

The workshops took three hours and covered (1) an *overview* of purpose and contents of the draft ENGAGED toolkit and (2) a *scenario-based discussion* on the disaster context of each pilot community (see the box below for an example). The goal of the scenario is to test the strength of relationships among NGOs and between NGOs and government partners.

> **Example Scenario from the New Mexico Workshop**
>
> Northern New Mexico is experiencing a historically significant period of drought, increasing the risk of wildfires. There are multiple additional risks that accompany wildfires occurring in areas surrounding Santa Clara Pueblo, including threats to the Los Alamos National Laboratory (where research on nuclear energy is conducted) and destructive flash flooding in burned regions.
>
> A fire started in the Santa Fe National Forest yesterday, and such weather conditions as strong unpredictable winds and low (or no) precipitation are likely to cause the fire to spread. Your organization should initiate emergency protocols to prepare for possible wildfires and other related disasters. The protocols address not only your staff's activities, but also any changes or expansions to services for your service population or constituents.

Specifically, the workshop agenda included the following:

- *Pilot test of Toolkit Section One: General Information Profile*. We allowed participants to take ten minutes to complete the general information profile and then engaged in an exercise to have participants share one or two things about their organizations that they think would surprise others in the room.
- *Pilot test of Toolkit Section Two: Disaster Skills Self-Assessment*. We asked participants to review the instructions, ask any questions, and then complete the self-assessment section of the toolkit. Once participants had completed the self-assessment, we went around the room and asked participants to share one strength and one weakness for their organizations.
- *Pilot test of Toolkit Section Three: Assessing Past Partnerships*. We facilitated a group discussion and rating of each domain (about ten minutes for each of six domains).
- *Pilot test of Toolkit Section Four: Next Steps*. We then opened it up for discussion to identify, given past history, what changes are needed to improve partnerships. We facilitated a discussion to identify between three and five concrete activities to improve partnerships over the next six months. We then suggested that participants engage in another conversation like this in six months to determine their progress and promote sustainability of their improvements.
- *Scenario-based discussion*. Once the toolkit pilot test was complete, we asked participants to reflect on the original scenario to determine what was learned from the toolkit that is relevant to the scenario.
- *Wrap-up*. We administered a short survey to participants to assess their satisfaction with the workshop and toolkit material and thanked them for their participation.

Findings from the participant survey suggested that participants were satisfied with the workshop (Table 1) and found the toolkit useful or very useful (Table 2). Ninety-seven percent of participants indicated that they would be likely or very likely to use the information provided in the workshop to form new partnerships or improve coordination with existing partners and develop new or revised plans for their organization. When asked about the sections of the toolkit that they liked most, participants indicated that "all sections were very helpful" and specified the planning template and self-assessment grids as particularly helpful. When asked which sections of the toolkit they liked least, most participants

indicated "none" or "N/A" or suggested that it should be more interactive. When asked what they learned from the workshop, participants indicated that they learned:

- the importance of building partnerships and alliances to improve their effectiveness in disaster response and recovery
- why it is necessary to understand the mission, roles, and responsibilities of other local partner organizations
- that many organizations did not have a sufficient disaster plan in place.

Despite each pilot test using a different scenario tailored to its geographic location, the feedback on the toolkit was similar in both pilot tests in that participants from each location indicated that the toolkit was helpful and suggested more interactivity to improve its user-friendliness.

Table 1. Participant Feedback on the Workshop (n=37)

	Very Dissatisfied	*Somewhat Dissatisfied*	*Somewhat Satisfied*	*Very Satisfied*
a. Quality of the information provided during today's workshop	8%	0	24%	68%
b. Relevance of the information to your work	8%	0	22%	70%
c. Clarity of the workshop	8%	0	22%	70%

Table 2. Participant Feedback on Toolkit Sections

	Very Useful	*Somewhat Useful*	*Somewhat Useful*	*Very Useful*
a. Completing and sharing general information profiles (n=36)	3%	3%	28%	66%
b. Disaster skills self-assessment (n=36)	3%	3%	25%	69%
c. Assessing past partnerships (n=35)	3%	6%	31%	60%
d. Creating an improvement plan (n=36)	3%	3%	22%	72%
e. Disaster scenario exercise (n=34)	0%	6%	32%	62%

In response to participants' feedback, we converted parts of the paper-based version of the toolkit into an online interactive tool. Sections Two and Three of the toolkit are available in an interactive format at www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TL202.html.

The goal of these sections is to provide easy-to-use, online checklists without having the user work through the entire toolkit.

During pilot testing, we fielded several questions about how to implement the toolkit. As a result of input, we added some text to the introduction of the toolkit that instructs users how the toolkit can be completed either (1) independently by a single NGO to benchmark its organizational capabilities to engage during a disaster or (2) as part of a broader emergency planning group (e.g., assemble a group of NGOs, then walk through the toolkit sections). We also added text to the introduction describing the sections of the toolkit and associated exercises in more detail to help users navigate the content.

Next Steps

To further test the operational model that the toolkit is based on, we conducted a survey of 226 NGOs that assesses their capabilities, services, and perceived engagement in and effect on disaster response and recovery in their communities. We recruited NGOs for the survey from member lists for the state chapters of VOADs. We asked respondents to complete the survey on behalf of their entire organization. Respondents were offered the option to receive a $20 gift card to reimburse them for the time spent completing the survey. We are currently analyzing the survey data and writing manuscripts to share survey findings. Note that the findings are intended not to inform the toolkit but to provide a useful complement to our analyses and development model.

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