Unit 7: Unmet Needs Committee
An unmet needs committee is a special recovery organization that many communities have adopted as part of their recovery planning. The unmet needs committee provides a “safety net” for many people who are affected by disasters and have not been able to access assistance for various reasons.
After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the purpose, mission, makeup, and procedures of an unmet needs committee.
- Identify the benefits of an unmet needs committee.
- Explain how an unmet needs committee operates.
The purpose of an unmet needs committee is to identify and help resolve disaster-related needs that have not been met by local, State, Federal, or voluntary agency providers.

Key Points

- Not all disaster recovery needs of individuals and families can be fully addressed by traditional State and Federal assistance programs. In most cases, local disasters will not result in a Presidential Declaration. Consequently, Federal disaster assistance will not be provided in these cases. Likewise, there is no guarantee that a local emergency or disaster will require State assistance, and when State assistance is provided, it may not meet all the needs of all disaster survivors.
An unmet needs committee provides a means of addressing disaster recovery needs in cases where:

- Governmental assistance programs are not available, or
- Governmental assistance is provided but falls short of meeting all the needs of disaster survivors.

An unmet needs committee can be used in any incident, large or small. This organization is especially effective when an incident does not result in outside assistance from the Federal Government or State governments. For example, some counties in southwest Virginia have established unmet needs committees to serve their citizens in time of need, with or without State or Federal disaster assistance.
### Structure of an Unmet Needs Committee

**Visual 7.5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mission of an unmet needs committee is to promote cooperation and coordination among local, State, Federal, and voluntary agencies to address recovery needs of individuals and families.</td>
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### Key Points

The mission of an unmet needs committee is to promote cooperation and coordination among local, State, Federal, and voluntary agencies to address recovery needs of individuals and families.
Structure of an Unmet Needs Committee

Visual 7.6

Committee Structure

- Local Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)
- American Red Cross
- United Way
- Faith Based and Community Organizations
- The Salvation Army
- Local government human services agencies
- Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)

Key Points

- Existing community service organizations usually provide the basis for an unmet needs committee. Examples are:
  - National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) and State or local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) member organizations may be able to form unmet needs committees.
  - American Red Cross
  - United Way
  - Faith Based and Community Organizations
  - The Salvation Army
  - Local government human services agencies
  - Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)

- Optimally, an unmet needs committee is organized before a disaster strikes. Local agencies should plan an unmet needs committee as a component of the local or State VOAD and Council of Churches.

- An unmet needs committee should be in place when a disaster strikes where multiple disaster relief agencies intend to provide services. If an unmet needs committee is not in place, one needs to be organized as soon as possible by local representatives of those service organizations after disaster strikes.

- Any organization providing resources in the recovery process for disaster-related needs can participate.

- The services of an unmet needs committee can be provided even without a formal committee being established. For example, a community may have existing arrangements among volunteer agencies, churches, and other organizations to share resources and provide assistance to individuals and families affected by any emergency or disaster.
National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) member organizations involved in the recovery process are strongly encouraged to provide leadership in the formation of unmet needs committees. Where there is a viable interfaith response organization, with members’ consent, the interfaith organization may represent its members.

At initial meetings, each participating organization needs to explain their criteria for resource provision. Also needed is an outline of what services each organization provides. This information, along with an activation process, should be documented in an unmet needs committee handbook for use during the recovery process.
Visual 7.7

Key Points

- During the response/recovery period, the local coordinator will convene and facilitate weekly meetings of the committee. Information about community resources will be shared.

- Families with disaster-related needs that have not been met through personal, local, State, Federal, or other voluntary resources may request consideration for assistance from the committee by applying through a participating agency. All agency pre-disaster eligibility criteria may be used.

- Agencies may bring cases directly to the committee if they are unable to meet client needs through their own resources or by working with other organizations.

- Through discussion and sharing options and resources, the committee will jointly develop a plan to meet the needs of each case brought to the committee.

- Commitment of resources by an organization will be voluntary and based on that organization’s eligibility criteria and approval.

- All cases presented to the committee must be accompanied by a Release of Confidentiality signed by the client so case information can be shared. Professional standards of confidentiality will apply to the committee as a whole.
Key Points

There are advantages for the agencies involved in an unmet needs committee, including:

- The committee approach expands each agency’s opportunity to help survivors who otherwise may not have received assistance.
- The committee approach makes the best use of each agency’s services and resources.
- The committee exchange will allow agencies to share information about cases they are serving and avoid duplicating benefits.
- The committee process provides a system for future interaction.
There are benefits for those who are affected by the disaster, including:

- Clients have access to the agencies simultaneously that specialize in many different forms of assistance.

- Clients have the benefit of the collective problem-solving skills of many experienced case managers who can initiate creative thinking processes to reach a common goal.

- Clients benefit from quick decisionmaking and commitments from agencies providing services and resources.
The Local Government Role—Student Manual

**Key Points**

- **Example of State Unmet Needs Program**

  Following a series of natural disasters in 1995 and 1996, the State of Virginia established a State Disaster Recovery Task Force to address unmet needs of disaster survivors for both Presidential and non-Presidential disasters. An excerpt from a 1997 newsletter of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development describes the activities of the task force as follows:

  - **Disaster Recovery Task Force Working on Unmet Needs**

    The State Disaster Recovery Task Force continues to make great strides to build local disaster recovery groups. This effort has grown out of the mobilization of the task force last fall to respond to the aftermath of Hurricane Fran. The purpose of the task force as to respond to the unmet needs of disaster survivors after traditional recovery resources had been utilized.

    The Secretary of Commerce and Trade heads the statewide task force, and has delegated the coordination of the task force to the Department of Housing and Community Development.
The focus has been on building local recovery groups for several reasons. First, the recovery groups need to be utilized at any time, not just in response to Federal or State declared disasters. Local groups can respond much more quickly and efficiently to meet post-disaster needs than a central organization. Local groups will more quickly draw upon local resources to help the people in that jurisdiction. They should also know better than an outside group of the areas around the city or county that are likely to have residents with unmet needs. Second, decisions regarding how assistance is distributed will be made locally and not by persons unfamiliar with the residents in the community. This structure allows local government and local private-sector groups to take responsibility for their own residents. The State task force will handle those unmet needs that cannot be dealt with at the local level.

The State task force will be in the proper role of taking on the responsibility of working with complex situations and those that require additional resources.

A variety of effective local recovery groups have been established over the past few months in meeting individual needs. They include: Rockingham, Shenandoah, Henry, Page, Franklin, Chesterfield, and Madison Counties and the City of Roanoke. These localities have built organizations that include representatives of a mixture of local government, community organizations, and private-sector groups. A proper mixture of groups represented on the task force is important to ensure that all available resources are utilized.
Key Points

- Assess your community’s pre-disaster recovery plan or annex and determine whether it includes an unmet needs committee.
Access the Unmet Needs folder on the Toolkit CD.
The key issues covered in this unit include:

- Structure
- Benefits
- Operations
Key Points

Are you now able to:

- Describe the purpose, mission, makeup, and procedures of an unmet needs committee?
- Identify the benefits of an unmet needs committee?
- Explain how an unmet needs committee operates?