

Avoid Unaccountable Fundraising

Disasters create huge public empathy and this often translates into massive donations for many causes, including the plight of animals. To be able to make the most out of donations messages about the needs of animals have to be carefully worded. For example, after Hurricane Andrew a call for horse halters resulted in over 4 tons of halters being donated, mostly used and therefore not suitable for use; after the Murrah Building bombing in Oklahoma City, the public donated thousands of pairs of booties for the dozen or so Urban Search and Rescue (U.S.A.R.) dogs, and after Hurricane Katrina the message of desperation was so effective that people donated private planes to relocate animals (often unlawfully) all over the U.S..

Because the needs for animals (housing, feed, handling equipment and environmental enrichment) that arise during a response are quickly and abundantly addressed through calls via the media, carelessly stated needs squander goodwill and potentially valuable resources. This happens when the media relies on frontline responders to describe the needs, which easily creates the impression that long term needs do not exist or overlook underlying problems, and therefore incite the public to respond overwhelmingly with donations suited to overcome temporary inconveniences. Effective fundraising communications convey real needs, are coordinated centrally, appropriately prioritized and given by qualified officials. Communicating through the official communications director is an example of how, through appropriate planning, tying animal issues into the official emergency management system can be highly beneficial and set the stage for a constructive recovery while the response is ongoing.

Other concerns over unaccountable fundraising range from fraud to diversion of donated funds to other causes and locations. Unaccountable fundraising can be very detrimental to long term recovery, and in the U.S. there are many legal accounting practices that allow donated funds to be used legally for projects not supported by donors. Fundraising fraud is common in disasters and raising funds for the care of animals is no exception. It is not uncommon to see new fundraising web sites pop up in the immediate wake of disasters, raise funds and then disappear without a trace within a few weeks. To avoid misleading well-meaning donors as well as to direct donations to the affected community, communities should identify recipient organizations for sponsors before a disaster strikes and agree in advance how disaster donations will be managed. During the preparedness phase these relationships between response and donor recipient organizations can be used to promote public awareness of the designated recipient on behalf of the community as well as how to message that relationship during the response to a disaster.

Having a designated recipient organization for donated funds also provides a mechanism for proper accounting for sponsors, whose donations may be further rewarded by tax incentives. Using local resources and expertise for fundraising also reduces the potential for outside charities, which facilities and majority of staff are unaffected by the disaster, to become the major recipient of donated funds instead of the affected community. Most large charities can quickly create national awareness, web presence and provide fundraising venues in disasters, however, few of them have actually been impacted by a disaster and as a result even fewer have developed an understanding of giving much back to affected communities.

For example, after Hurricane Katrina it was estimated that the American public donated over \$40 million to help animals. Although it is understandable that only a small proportion of those funds could be spent on the response, of greater concern is the evidence of how little funds were later devoted to the recovery, specifically rebuilding the animal health infrastructure of the affected areas or elsewhere in the U.S.. Although the amount of funds raised for animals after

Hurricane Katrina was extreme and probably more than the affected communities could have used to rebuild, donated funds did not appear to have enhanced response capability or investments in recovery effort to subsequent large scale disasters at other locations. Many States have an Emergency Support Function (ESF) for notification of the public on what donations are needed, designated reception sites, storage and distribution of donated materials; these official ESF are also best suited to coordinate the soliciting of resources for animals.