

Disaster Case Management:

An overview and recommendations for implementation and support

Disaster case management (DCM) is essential to the recovery process.

DCM enables and empowers local communities to work with disaster-affected families and individuals to determine their specific needs as they begin to recover.

DCM goes beyond providing relief and meeting basic needs. It provides the tools and a vetted process to work with disaster survivors on their unique path to recovery.

Recovery is a long and arduous process. It is always complex. Those affected need an advocate within the community who can help them navigate and access all available resources.

Often, DCM falls inside a local long-term recovery group (LTRG) or community coalition. Case managers may come from different organizations but are coordinated through the LTRG. By using a DCM system, communities get timely and essential information on individual, household and broader needs that must be addressed for full recovery. The DCM process informs the community on which resources are needed and ensures that those resources are distributed in a timely and transparent process developed by the LTRG.

[National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster \(VOAD\)](#) defines DCM as a "time-limited process by which a skilled helper (Disaster Case Manager) partners with a

disaster-affected individual or family in order to plan for and achieve realistic goals for recovery following a disaster." They define the disaster case manager as the "primary point of contact, assisting the client in coordinating necessary services and resources to address the client's complex disaster recovery needs in order to re-establish normalcy. Disaster case managers rely on the client to play an active or lead role in their own recovery."

Levels of disaster case management

Depending on the scope and scale of the disaster and state resources, there are different options for DCM available to communities. Your state VOAD should be able to assist you with understanding which system is in play for a specific disaster. In the case where state or federal assistance is available directly to individuals and households, case managers should receive additional training to ensure they are assisting clients with accessing all available resources and avoiding duplication of benefits. Disaster case management is an evolving practice; checking with state and federal agencies and experienced VOAD organizations is important for all levels of DCM.

Disaster casework. The distinction between disaster casework and disaster case management is in timing, duration and services. Casework typically includes only early interventions to address immediate needs versus longer-term assistance that extends beyond relief, referrals and urgent needs. Some individuals and households, especially those with access to personal resources, need only minimal assistance.

Locally defined. Communities are responsible for developing and implementing their own DCM processes, especially in low-attention disasters. State VOADs and regional and national organizations can assist with training and leading practices for case management. While this case management can take various forms and names, it is important that the process follow a set of agreed-upon guidelines that promote equity.

State defined. In some locations, there is a state-defined process for DCM, and a designated organization is tasked with implementing state programs. Check with your state VOAD or office of emergency management to understand if this is the case in your location.

Federally defined. In some instances, after a federally declared disaster, FEMA may fund a supplemental program, sometimes referred to as Disaster Case Management Program (DCMP). This program provides assistance to state, local, tribal or territorial governments, or qualified private organizations, through a federal award to fund and implement disaster case management. Disaster case management services are closely monitored in these cases and must adhere to all federal guidelines. Refer to FEMA's [Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide \(IAPPG\)](#).

Implementing disaster case management

Facilitating and coordinating DCM is usually led by a local agency or entity, whether a LTRG or a local affiliate of some of the country's leading disaster relief and recovery organizations. At times, DCM can be implemented by a community-based organization that has experience with other forms of case management or social service provision; for these organizations, there are several options for training so that case managers have specific information about disaster needs.

The process of DCM typically includes outreach and screening, intake, assessment, recovery planning, advocacy, monitoring progress and closure. To successfully implement a DCM process, we suggest four key components:

1. **Coordination.** A coordinating body such as an LTRG, unmet needs table or community coalition is essential. This coordinating entity should develop agreed-upon, transparent and equity-centered guidelines for the allocation of resources.
2. **Training & Coaching.** Training should include specifics of disasters, disaster case management, confidentiality and psychosocial support for clients.
3. **Resources.** Sufficient resources or a resource development plan should be developed. Resources include materials, funds, volunteers and information.
4. **Support.** Case managers need support to ensure they have appropriate caseloads, self-care and wellness breaks and sufficient compensation.

Supporting disaster case management

As a critical part of disaster recovery for the community, LTRGs and organizations coordinating recovery require funding to develop and maintain the capacity to implement DCM.

Fund staffing: While there are historically some instances of volunteer disaster case managers, we contend that the complexity and significance of the work require compensation. Consider funding other long-term recovery roles in the community as well. Roles that directly support DCM include volunteer management and construction management.

Fund training and coaching: DCM is most successful when it is supported by ongoing coaching or supervision from an individual or organization with experience.

Fund unmet needs: Case management without resources to assist clients is exceptionally frustrating. Provide funds that can be utilized for purchasing goods and materials for repair and rebuild. Also, consider providing funds for legal fees, child care needs and gas/food cards or other flexible funds that the case manager can use to meet some urgent client needs as they arise.

Support beyond the check: As a funder, especially if you are a local funder, you can play a role in convening or providing leadership for the coordinating body,

communicating unmet needs to other funders and potential partners and acting as a fiscal sponsor for the LTRG or community-based organization sponsoring disaster case management.

Further Reading/Resources

Midwest Early Recovery Fund: DCM grant overview and sample job description (Appendix A and B below)

- [National VOAD's Disaster Case Management Resource Library, Disaster Case Management: Disaster Leadership Team, Inc.](#)
- [DCM Essentials Training: Catholic Charities USA](#)
- CDP Resources: [FEMA](#), [Disaster case management is critical to long-term recovery](#)

Examples of disaster case management grants from CDP

- [Impact Story](#): CDP's Midwest Early Recovery Fund awarded \$221,023 to Heartland United Way to support two disaster recovery advocates and a coordinator in response to 2019 flooding.
- [Impact Story](#): CDP's Midwest Early Recovery Fund awarded \$60,000 to Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph for DCM in response to 2020 flooding.
- [Wildfire Funding](#): \$250,000 to Community Foundation Sonoma County to support ongoing disaster case management through the Kincadee Wildfire Recovery Project.

Here to help

If you are interested in implementing or supporting DCM, we are here to help. Reach out before or after a disaster has struck your community. We are ready to provide thought leadership, advice on establishing disaster funds, and connections to colleagues around the nation who can support and inform your efforts.

Contact:

Cari Cullen | Director | CDP Midwest Early Recovery Fund | cari.cullen@disasterphilanthropy.org

Appendix A:

Midwest Early Recovery Fund Grant: Disaster Case Management

Purpose

The Disaster Case Management (DCM) Grant Package addresses the critical challenges faced by communities affected by low-attention disasters. During early recovery, the transition period from response to recovery, communities often struggle to:

- Translate the highly complex system of disaster recovery into actionable steps.
- Coordinate survivor information and ensure equitable distribution of resources from multiple agencies.
- Identify and secure sufficient resources to address the unmet needs of those most vulnerable to the impact of disasters.
- Develop and sustain mid- to long-term recovery efforts.
- Meet the unique needs of children post-disaster.

A grant for DCM from the Midwest Early Recovery Fund will support your community's efforts to identify those affected by the disaster and prioritize needs by identifying those most vulnerable to the disaster's impact. It will afford your community the support system needed to help each individual and family develop their unique path to recovery.

A DCM system will provide your community with timely and essential information on what individual households and the whole community needs to recover. The DCM process will inform the community what resources are needed and ensure those resources are distributed in a timely and transparent process developed by the long-term recovery group (LTRG).

Objectives and activities of disaster case management

DCM is an essential component of the recovery process. It provides the tools and a vetted process to work with individuals and families on their unique paths to recovery. Recovery is a long and arduous process. It is always complicated. Those impacted need an advocate within the community who can navigate available resources and ensure all available resources can be accessed by anyone eligible for those resources promptly.

Funding Range:

- \$50,000-120,000*

Typical Timeline:

- Start 3-6 months post disaster
- 12-18 month project period

Included with Package:

- Job description of DCM
- Funding for training, salary(ies), travel and office needs
- Technical assistance and ongoing support

* Varies depending on community location and needs

Typically, DCM can start once a long-term recovery committee has been established and/or an Individual and Household Survey or needs assessment has been completed by the LTRG or other coordinating entity. A local nonprofit or the fiscal agent of the LTRG can apply for funding to hire one or more disaster case managers as needed.

What is a disaster case manager?

Disaster case managers empower individuals and works alongside individuals and households to address their disaster recovery needs. They are advocates, navigators, partners, connectors, conduits and points of contact.

Typical activities of a case manager include:

- Seeks out those disproportionately affected by the disaster.
- Ensures equitable recovery by prioritizing and coordinating the distribution of resources.
- Advocates for those not able to advocate for themselves.
- Partners with clients to locate all possible recovery resources.
- Applies a holistic approach, understanding all needs are not physical.
- Understands the unique needs of each individual and family.
- Advocates for "clients as a whole" to the community at large so that the affected community can develop the resources it needs to ensure *all* residents recover and remain.

What's in a typical disaster case management grant application?

If you are an LTRG or nonprofit organization interested in a DCM grant from CDP, we would be happy to assist you in applying and developing application question answers; we find that answering these questions will help you to better understand and refine the work you will be doing.

Each community and each disaster is unique. Tailor your project to the needs of the community *and* keep it flexible and broad so you can respond to changing needs. This includes utilizing different staffing structures (full-time, part-time, one or multiple managers), titles for case managers (advocates, navigators, etc.) and training methods.

In the application process, you will be asked to identify the following:

1. Project Goal.
2. Detailed Project Description.
3. Disaster Needs to Be Addressed.
4. Activities and Results.
5. Budget Narrative.

Your organization will be asked to provide:

1. Project budget.
2. IRS 501(c)(3) Determination Letter.
3. W-9.
4. Audit or current board-approved budget, current balance sheet and YTD income.
5. Form 990.

Next Steps

1. Send email to Cari.Cullen@disasterphilanthropy or call 320.266.4391 to start the process.
2. CDP will:
 - a. Investigate the disaster and qualify the event as low attention with significant unmet needs.
 - b. If deemed necessary, make a site visit to engage with community partners to identify challenges and prioritize needs.
 - c. Develop a community disaster impact profile to better understand assets and unmet needs.
3. You may be asked to:
 - a. Provide information to Fund staff to complete a proposal and application.
 - b. Work with Fund staff to develop a recovery work plan and budget.
 - c. Provide updates and reporting to staff as requested.

Appendix B:

Midwest Early Recovery Fund Job Description*: Disaster Case Manager

DISASTER CASE MANAGER COMPETENCIES

Discernment/judgement
Crisis Management
Adaptability
Compassionate
Professionalism
Communication
Attention to detail
Technical expertise
Reliability
Confidentiality
Continuous learning
Collaboration
Problem solving
Strategic
Innovative

Summary of the Position

The Disaster Case Manager works directly with individuals and households affected by disaster and acts as a facilitator and advocate to empower their recovery process. The Disaster Case Manager helps clients identify unmet needs and recovery goals and then collaborates with other agencies and the long-term recovery group (LTRG) to meet those needs and goals while ensuring the client takes responsibility for their recovery.

Disaster case management as defined by [NVOAD](#) is “a time-limited process by which a skilled disaster recovery specialist – a disaster case manager – partners with a disaster-affected individual or household to plan for and achieve realistic disaster recovery goals”.

Supervision and Time Commitment

The Disaster Case Manager reports to [].

The position requires [] hours per week and is anticipated to last for [] months.

Essential Functions and Responsibilities

Work alongside clients

- Serve as a point of contact for disaster-impacted individuals and families to help connect them to resources in a timely and efficient manner.
- Contact survivors as soon as possible. Safety factors should be kept in mind, including a team approach for home visits.
- Help clients review all that has happened and all the assistance they have received. Identify any urgent unmet needs and refer to the proper resource(s).
- Remain in contact with the client until the disaster-related needs are met and/or the case is closed.

- Take time for closure with the family once it is determined that the case should be closed or referred.

Facilitate and advocate for recovery

- Attend training sessions to learn to identify, validate and collaborate on solutions to meet survivor needs.
- Enable clients to take responsibility for their recovery, acting as an advocate and facilitator as opposed to as a rescuer.
- When appropriate, present individual cases to LTRG or unmet needs committee.
- Respect confidentiality at all times, at home, in public, in committee meetings and in consultations.
- Serve as an advocate for clients to inform the LTRG of critically needed resources and distribute them to clients using an agreed-upon process.

Maintain case files and documentation

- Receive and undertake assignments given by the supervisor.
- Consult with the Case Manager Supervisor or committee to prioritize cases and set objectives.
- Relay all information to the Case Manager Supervisor at regular briefings. Keep detailed records of these meetings.
- Secure and maintain the appropriate release of information for each client.
- Keep detailed records of every case, every home visit, every referral and every contact with resources on the client's behalf.

Resource coordination

- Understand what resources and assets are available in the community to assist individuals and households with immediate needs.
- Network with other agencies to stay informed about services and resources.
- Follow up with other agencies to ensure that assistance commitments have been met.

Characteristics

- Respect for the beliefs of others.
- Deep concern about people and their welfare.
- Respect for cultural, racial and social differences.
- A genuine like for people
- An empathetic and effective listener.
- Patient with people and circumstances.
- Flexible.
- Supportive and non-critical of other agencies, fellow workers or clients.
- An outgoing personality and the right attitude.

- A good sense of humor.
- Persevering through adversity.
- Able to put personal goals behind those of others in need.
- Creative and resourceful.
- Observant and objective.
- Respectful of the privacy of others.
- Able to respect and maintain confidentiality.
- Take directions willingly.
- Enjoy problem-solving.
- Enjoy detail work.
- Realistic.
- Have good stress coping skills.
- Able to be self-directing.

Qualifications

- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Ability to thoroughly document conversations and actions regarding case management.
- Ability to communicate effectively with creditors and vendors to negotiate bills and advocate for discounts, extended payment schedules or write-offs.
- Possession of good interpersonal skills.
- Capacity for empathy.
- Satisfactory background check.

* We encourage you to adapt the job description to your community and organization's needs.